

Barrie

15 Sperling Drive
Barrie, Ontario

Phone: (705) 721-7520
Fax: (705) 721-1495
www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

GESTATIONAL WEIGHT GAIN SURVEY REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY

*AN OVERVIEW OF HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
BEHAVIOURS OF PREGNANT WOMEN IN THE SIMCOE
MUSKOKA DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT AREA*

Report prepared by:

Becky Blair, Public Health Nutritionist
Jennifer Hutcheson, Public Health Nurse
Martha Lamon, Public Health Nurse

Reproductive Health Program
Family Health Service

April 2012



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In their 2009 report, *Weight Gain During Pregnancy: Reexamining the Guidelines*, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) identified associations between excess gestational weight gain (GWG) and adverse birth and maternal outcomes.^{1,2} The report includes guidelines for appropriate gestational weight gain ranges and rates, based on pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index (BMI). These guidelines were adopted by Health Canada³.

In order to develop a comprehensive health promotion plan related to healthy weight gain in pregnancy, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) implemented the *Food and Exercise in Pregnancy Survey*. Eligible participants were at least 18 years of age, 14 or more weeks gestation, could read English and were receiving antenatal care from a health care provider (HCP) who practiced within the SMDHU catchment area. A total of 457 surveys were analyzed.

Body Mass Index (BMI) and Gestational Weight Gain

Approximately 54% of our sample entered pregnancy at a BMI⁴ which fell within the normal weight category; 42% entered pregnancy at a BMI which fell within either the overweight category or the obese category. Only 5% of the pregnant women surveyed had a pre-pregnancy BMI defined as underweight.

Fifty-eight per cent (58%) of the sample were exceeding their recommended GWG rate at the time of the survey; 23% had already exceeded the upper limit of their recommended GWG range³.

Nutrition Behaviour

Thirty-six percent reported consuming fewer than the recommended 7-9 servings of Vegetables and Fruit⁵; 34% reported consuming more than 9 servings. Although women consumed an average of eight servings of Vegetables & Fruit, two of these servings were from fruit juice. Forty percent of pregnant women consumed the recommended 2-3 servings of products from the Milk and Alternatives food group⁵. Forty-seven percent of pregnant women over-consumed Milk & Alternatives. The average number of Milk & Alternatives servings consumed was 3.5, with 43% of these servings being any type of cheese. Cheese and fruit juice may contribute to excess calorie intake.

Pregnant women were more likely to exceed their recommended GWG rate if they reported consuming fast food more frequently than “rarely or never”.

Physical Activity

Thirty-two per cent of women surveyed reported engaging in moderate exercise for at least 15-30 minutes 3-4 times per week, as recommended in the Joint Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC)/Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) Clinical Practice Guideline: *Exercise in Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period*⁶. Twenty-eight per cent reported rarely or never engaging in moderate exercise. Over half of our sample (57%) reported they engaged in less moderate physical activity since pregnancy began.

Barriers to Healthy Eating and Exercise

Just over half (52%) of women reported they were told by their health care provider to exercise. A similar proportion was told to follow Canada's Food Guide⁵ (55%) during their pregnancy. A smaller proportion of women were given specific advice.

Prenatal Health Information

The top three preferred sources of prenatal health information were: one-to-one discussion with Health Care Providers (HCPs) (77%), websites and books written by health experts (41%) and in-person prenatal classes (40%).

Conclusions

Since a large proportion of pregnant women in Simcoe Muskoka are exceeding their recommended GWG rate, it is clear many women need guidance and support to achieve healthy weight gain during pregnancy. Eating according to *Canada's Food Guide*⁵, including the recommended number/size of servings for pregnant women and following the recommendations for physical activity outlined in the joint SOGC/CSEP Guideline⁶ will contribute to their success. Discussing strategies to decrease fast food consumption may support the achievement of recommended weight gain rates and ranges.

Working collaboratively to support pregnant women to achieve healthy weight gain during pregnancy is a critical component of a comprehensive health promotion plan. In order to optimize maternal and child health outcomes related to gestational weight gain, health care providers must have the tools and resources required to address healthy lifestyle recommendations for pregnant women, calculate pre-pregnancy BMI, communicate individual GWG range and rate, plot GWG throughout pregnancy and make appropriate referrals to registered dietitians and other community supports.

For references, please refer to full report.