The features pregnant women want in a web-based nutrition resource

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Maternal nutrition during pregnancy influences the long-term health outcomes of both the woman and her offspring[1]. In the absence of certain medical complications, women usually receive little formal dietary guidance from healthcare professionals (HCPs) during pregnancy. Consequently, pregnant women are increasingly turning to web-based resources for nutritional information[2]. There are an increasing number of online resources providing nutritional guidance, many of which are not evidence-based, or regulated or monitored in terms of their content by a registered HCP[3]. This study examined the use of web-based nutritional information by women during pregnancy and explored their preferences in this area.

Participants were enrolled at their convenience in a large Dublin maternity hospital. Women completed a detailed questionnaire which collected clinical and sociodemographic data in addition to information on their use of online resources. Informed consent was obtained from all women. The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committees of DIT and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital.

Of the 101 women recruited, 41·6 % were nulliparous and the mean age was 33·1 years (19–47 years). All women had internet access and only 3 % did not own a smartphone. Women derived pregnancy-related nutritional information from a range of online resources, most commonly: What to Expect When You're Expecting (15·1 %), Babycenter (12·9 %) and Eumom (9·7 %). However, 24·7 % reported using Google searches. There was minimal use of publically-funded or academically-supported resources. The features women wanted in a web-based nutrition resource are outlined in the table below.

Top features	n	%
Recipes	88	88 %
Exercise advice	71	71 %
Personalised dietary feedback	37	37 %
Social features	35	35 %
Videos	24	24 %
Cooking demonstrations	23	23 %

These findings suggest that pregnant women use a variety of online resources when seeking web-based nutritional information. These are mainly commercial, with minimal use of publically-funded or academically-supported resources. This increases their risk of receiving dietary advice which is inconsistent and not scientifically based. The features of a web-based resource identified to be of greatest interest to pregnant women were recipes, exercise advice and personalised dietary feedback.

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