

Title: Diet and Physical Activity-Related Beliefs and Practices among Pregnant and Postpartum Latino Women: The Role of Social Support.

Authors:

- Thornton, P.
- Kieffer, E.C.
- Salabarría-Peña, Y.
- Odoms-Young, A.M.
- Willis, S. K.
- Kim, H.K.
- Salinas, M.A

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Abstract

Objectives: Eating and physical activity patterns may contribute to excessive pregnancy weight gain and postpartum retention that increase the risks of obesity and diabetes for both Latino mothers and their children. Social support is an important health determinant and may affect health-related beliefs and behaviors. The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of social support on weight, diet, and physical activity-related beliefs and behaviors among pregnant and postpartum Latinas.

Methods: A community-based participatory project, Promoting Healthy Lifestyles among Women, was conducted in southwest Detroit to plan interventions aimed at reducing risks of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Qualitative analyses of in-depth semistructured interviews with dyads of 10 pregnant and postpartum Latinas, and 10 people who influenced them were conducted.

Results: Husbands and some female relatives were primary sources of emotional, instrumental, and informational support for weight, diet, and physical activity-related beliefs and behaviors for Latina participants. Holistic health beliefs and the opinions of others consistently influenced Latinas' motivation and beliefs about the need to remain healthy and the links between behavior and health. Absence of mothers, other female relatives, and friends to provide childcare, companionship for exercise, and advice about food were prominent barriers that limited women's ability to maintain healthy practices during and after pregnancy.

Conclusion: The findings support evidence that low-income, recently immigrated pregnant and postpartum Latinas could benefit from community-based, family-oriented interventions that provide social support necessary to promote and sustain healthy lifestyles.