

"How do I know what is right?"

Perceptions of antenatal exercise in pregnant individuals and the impact of COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Exercise during pregnancy has a plethora of benefits, yet pregnancy is typically characterised by a decrease in activity levels.

Barriers reported include insufficient time, lack of childcare, lack of facilities, discomfort, fatigue, and concerns about risk of exercise during pregnancy.

The Coronavirus 2019 pandemic presented many specific challenges for pregnant women which may have exacerbated these barriers to physical activity.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 14 pregnant females between Nov 2020 and May 2021 in the UK to explore participant's perceived barriers to antenatal exercise during the pandemic.

Questionnaires reporting anxiety, depression and physical activity were completed.



Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Our data suggests that to encourage pregnant individuals to perform antenatal exercise, access to credible information and better education is essential. Support and reassurance for individuals from friends, family, and healthcare providers, was important to reduce distress during pregnancy. Perceived support was reduced for some participants due to the pandemic.

Previous activity habits
shaping current habits

Seeing the value in being
active: perceived importance

Adjusting to becoming
pregnant

Adapting activity whilst
experiencing pregnancy
symptoms

Perceptions of being
an active person
shaping activity levels
in pregnancy

A process of
adaptations and
adjustment

How do I know what
is right? Uncertainty,
seeking validation
and feeling informed

Motivators to
antenatal exercise

Uncertainty and seeking
validation

Credibility: trusting the
information received

Training for future self

Having someone there

Having the time and
resources to exercise

CONCLUSION

The pandemic increased barriers to exercise for some females but mitigated barriers for others. Findings highlight the importance of direct psychosocial support and clear, trustworthy information for pregnant individuals. Additionally, this study can be used to inform development of comprehensive and appropriate promotional strategies for antenatal exercise.