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Iodine supplementation during pregnancy: are pregnant women aware of its importance?

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Abstract

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Iodine supplementation during pregnancy: Are pregnant women aware of its importance?

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Introduction

Insufficient iodine intake during pregnancy is the leading cause of preventable mental impairment worldwide. Iodine supplementation during pregnancy and lactation is recommended in countries with low soil iodine and without a universal salt iodisation programme, including Australia, to prevent the deficiency. Even mild iodine deficiency during pregnancy has been associated with reduced cognitive outcomes of children of primary school age. Pregnant women do not appear to be well advised about its role and requirements, in contrast to folic acid for which pregnant women appear well informed.

Aim

To present the knowledge and practices of childbearing women related to iodine and folic acid supplementation.

Methods

A survey of pregnant women at 22 weeks gestation was undertaken. Pregnant women were recruited from antenatal clinic of the major public hospital in the Illawarra area of New South Wales. In addition to other aspects of the study, participants completed a survey at 22 weeks gestation which asked questions related to nutrition.

Results

A total of 39 participants have been recruited to date. Most participants (85%) reported taking a supplement during pregnancy, 74% and 77% reported taking a supplement containing iodine and folic acid respectively. Just under two thirds (62%) of participants felt they had received adequate information about iodine, compared to 87% for folic acid.

Conclusion

Over two thirds of participants (69%) knew that the recommended period to take folic acid supplements was prior to conception and during the first trimester, whereas only 38.5% knew that iodine should be taken throughout the entire pregnancy. Although these findings only represent a small number of participants, they add to the existing literature which highlights that pregnant women are poorly informed about iodine. Antenatal care providers should ensure that their pregnant clients are well educated about supplementation recommendations during pregnancy.