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The thoughts and feelings of student midwives regarding offering healthy eating advice during antenatal care

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Antenatal Care Guidelines⁽¹⁾ state that midwives should discuss nutrition, diet and vitamin supplementation at booking-in appointments. However, midwives report a lack of confidence and skills regarding advising women about health eating⁽²⁾. The aim of this study was to evaluate nutrition education sessions for student midwives, delivered by a dietitian.

Second year student midwives (n = 23) were recruited during a taught nutrition session at their university. They were asked to provide free-text feedback on anonymous post-it notes regarding their thoughts and feelings about offering healthy eating and weight management advice during antenatal care. The comments were collated and analysed thematically.

Two main themes were identified: 1) confidence about delivering healthy eating advice and 2) nutrition knowledge. Regarding confidence, about half of the students stated that they had '*increased confidence*' about giving healthy eating advice after taught sessions, however some also stated that it could be '*difficult to broach [the] subject with some women*' and expressed concerns about '*causing offence*', particularly in relation to providing weight management advice. In terms of nutrition knowledge, despite the nutrition education session, the students still felt that they '*don't have enough knowledge*' and '*need to know more*' about nutrition as a midwife. Some also felt '*embarrassment*' or '*hypocritical*' about giving healthy eating advice, due to a lack of nutrition knowledge, or by reflecting on their own poor eating habits.

The results from this convenience sample of student midwives corroborates existing findings⁽²⁾ that there is a gap in the education and practice of midwives about nutrition during pregnancy. However, delivering pregnancy-specific nutrition knowledge, via a nutrition expert appears to be well received and could help students to develop increasing confidence to communicate healthy eating messages to women in their antenatal care. Further input from other experts may also be needed to help them to approach '*Difficult convos*'. This feedback provides further insight into how midwifery nutrition education needs to be tailored, to benefit midwives and improve antenatal care.

References

1. NICE (2021) *Antenatal care guidelines* [Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng201/resources/antenatal-care-pdf-6614370969594>].
2. McCann M, Newson LM, Burden C, *et al.* (2018) *Matern Child Nutr* 14 (2), e12520.