

Exploring the perceived barriers to following a Mediterranean style diet in women of childbearing age in the United Kingdom: a qualitative study.

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Background

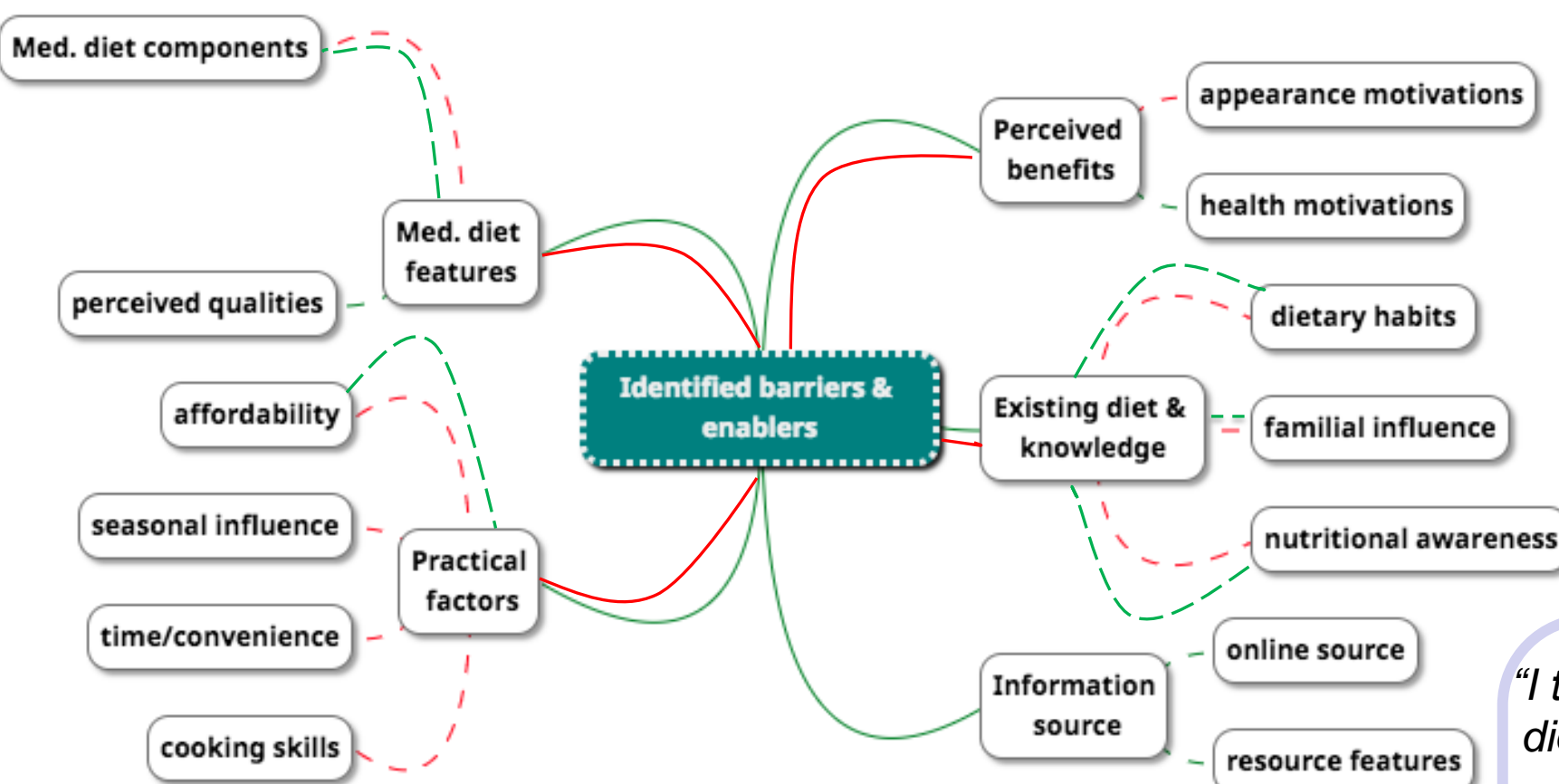
Promotion of healthy dietary patterns similar to a Mediterranean (Med.) style diet in preconception years has been suggested as a dietary strategy to prevent maternal obesity ⁽¹⁾, but it remains uncertain whether adoption is feasible in women of childbearing age in the UK. This qualitative study aimed to investigate the perceived barriers to following a Med. style diet in women of childbearing age in the UK.

Methods & Analysis

Twenty women were recruited from the South of England (April– June 2017) ; were eligible if aged between 18 and 49 years, held UK residency, were nulliparous, did not study or have an occupation directly related to nutrition, and had low or medium adherence to a Med. style diet ⁽²⁾. Six semi-structured focus groups were used to generate deep insights. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using inductive thematic analysis⁽³⁾.

Results

Figure 1. Identified barrier and enabler themes and subthemes*



* Green lines indicate enabling factors, red lines indicate barriers; solid lines indicate themes and dashed lines subthemes

Theme 1: Mediterranean diet features

Intrinsic qualities of the Med. style diet were appealing:

"It's quite diverse...normally you're quite restricted but it seems like most food groups are involved in the diet"

But some aspects of the content specifically were perceived as barriers:

"I eat a lot of red meat, that's what I would find hard, making it more plant based"

Theme 2: Perceived Benefits

In line with participants' motivations for adopting a healthy diet, the perceived health benefits could enable adoption:

"I want to prevent things before they're at risk...I don't want to have heart disease when I'm older so I am going to think about this when I am eating"

But lack of highlighted aesthetic benefits pose a potential barrier due to the importance placed on appearance in this group of women:

"I don't feel like things like heart disease and stroke...I don't think about that at the moment, I think more about fitness and what I am going to look like in a bikini"

Participants' characteristics, n=20

- Aged 27 years (SD 9)
- Mean BMI 23 (SD 4)
- Med. diet adherence score 5.6 (SD 1)
- Twelve university students and eight employed non-students
- Eighteen White British, two White Other

Theme 3: Existing dietary behaviour and knowledge

Nutritional awareness, familial influence, and diet habits showed potential to be enablers or barriers:

"I think people who eat quite a normal diet, or healthy diet anyway, would be more likely to make changes"

"I would love to cook with lentils and pulses...but I would need to work on my other half because he thinks a meal without meat is not a meal"

"...whenever I look up what's good for you and what's not, there are cross cuts all over the place, so never actually know what sort of diet is good for you"

Theme 4: Practical factors

Cost and seasonal availability were significant factors:

"When it comes to fresh diets, it's really dependent on the seasons... it might be really hard and really expensive to get things..."

"You've got that whole budget thing where some people might argue about the money, but I always argue that point that you can eat well on a budget"

Cooking skills were also considered essential:

"If I didn't cook and looked at this I would think...I would just have to eat salad all the time"

Theme 5: Information source

All participants expressed a preference for accessing information delivered via the internet, and possible online promotion of a Med. style diet was considered appealing.

"it's so easy to find stuff online, from recipes or other ways to get more olive oil into your diet ..there's never been a better time"

Conclusions

The present study highlights that a Med. style diet is acceptable to childbearing aged women, and the insights generated will be helpful in developing an intervention to promote Mediterranean style diet adoption.

References

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2. Martínez-González MA, García-Arellano A, et al. (2012) *PLoS One* 8:e43134.
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