



## Abstract

# Exploration of Perceptions and Attitudes of Couples in the Preconception Period in Relation to Healthy Eating and Healthy Body Weight: A Qualitative Study <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Presented at the 14th European Nutrition Conference FENS 2023, Belgrade, Serbia, 14–17 November 2023.

**Keywords:** preconception period; educational tool; healthy diet

Evidence suggests that parental overweight/obesity during the preconception period, which can be a year before conception [1], may adversely affect offspring's metabolic health in later life [2]. This study aimed to explore couples' perceptions toward healthy eating and lifestyles in the preconception period, which can help inform the development of targeted interventions. Eight pregnancy-planning couples were recruited using purposive–snowballing sampling and participated in a semi-structured online interview. Recordings were anonymised, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using phenomenological thematic analysis [3]. Couples' mean overall age was 34.3 years, and BMI was 26.8 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, while the majority held a postgraduate degree (n = 9). Data analysis revealed seven themes: mental health matters; lifestyle behaviours that could change; physical health matters; establishing healthier habits; all things diet; preconception knowledge; and need for guidance. Data indicated limited preconception knowledge, particularly evident in men. During our interview, most men realised that men's preconception period can be important, indicating a lack of knowledge, and expressed interest in learning more: “. . . I would be happy also to ask for a professional advice, I'm just not sure if I would before this interview-if I would consider it necessary, now I do to be honest. . .”. The main motivators for making any dietary or lifestyle changes were to support maternal health, offer the “best start” to their child, and ensure they did the best they could to support a pregnancy. Most participants looked for information online when unsure and would welcome an online educational tool with opportunities to ask questions. Many explained that it is important to avoid information overload, while a few explained they did not look for information at all. Stress was a significant factor affecting efforts to implement changes (diet, smoking, body weight, sleep, exercise) and was one of the main behaviours that participants wanted to manage. Based on the results of this study, there is a paucity of knowledge around men's preconception health. An online interactive education tool could support couples in the preconception period to achieve healthier habits.



**Citation:** Arvanitidou, E.-I.; Tsofliou, F.; Wood, J. Exploration of Perceptions and Attitudes of Couples in the Preconception Period in Relation to Healthy Eating and Healthy Body Weight: A Qualitative Study. *Proceedings* **2023**, *91*, 148. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2023091148>

Academic Editors: Sladjana Sobajic and Philip Calder

Published: 1 February 2024



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**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, E.-I.A., F.T. and J.W.; methodology, E.-I.A., F.T. and J.W.; formal analysis, E.-I.A.; investigation, E.-I.A.; data curation, E.-I.A.; writing—original draft preparation, E.-I.A.; writing—review and editing, E.-I.A., F.T. and J.W.; supervision, F.T. and J.W.; project administration, E.-I.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Science, Technology & Health Research Ethics Panel, Bournemouth University; ethics ID: 32789.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request following the first author's PhD research completion.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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