

## Mum knows best? Pregnant women more likely to follow their mothers' wisdom than medical advice

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Researchers from Royal Holloway, University of London have found that pregnant and postnatal women, while wanting to do the best for their baby, do not follow medical advice without question and are more likely to adopt practices their mothers and grandmothers carried out during their pregnancies.

The study by Professor Paula Nicolson and Dr Rebekah Fox from the Department of Health and Social Care at Royal Holloway is published in the 'Journal of Health Psychology' and explores three recent generations

of [women](#)'s experiences of pregnancy, questioning those who gave birth in the 1970s, 1980s and 2000s.

The women who were interviewed said they knew their mothers and grandmothers had their best interests at heart when they offered them advice. For the older women questioned, the advice from their female relations was their main source of information.

The 1980s and 2000s group, however, had to reconcile what they heard from older generations with direct advice from their doctors, [midwives](#) and health visitors as well as the numerous health messages on the web and self-help books.

Professor Nicolson says, "It is much to the credit of contemporary women that despite the unprecedented pressures from the media, medicine and the 'pregnancy police' that they are still able to filter-in the advice that really suits them from all these sources. Each of the three generations found ways to 'resist' what they considered inappropriate pressures from advisors and were more likely to follow advice given to them from their mothers and grandmothers even if it went against the medical professions advice.

"Women tend to discuss the advice they are given with their female relatives and this leads to resistance to some types of advice. For example, despite being advised to cut down on caffeine during pregnancy one woman we questioned said she continued to drink tea because her [grandmother](#) told her it relieved her [morning sickness](#)."

Professor Nicolson says women who take notice of general public health information about what is a healthy lifestyle, i.e not smoking, taking regular exercise, not taking drugs and drinking alcohol in moderation are those who are most likely to be in-tune with their bodies and can therefore 'use' guidelines but not be constrained by them.

She added: “Taking all the guidelines too seriously leads to anxieties. Lack of self-confidence also can lead to worry about ‘doing the wrong thing’ which is potentially more harmful than taking the odd glass of wine or eating soft cheese.”

To read the paper in full please visit:

[hpq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/15/4/575](http://hpq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/15/4/575)

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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