

Expectant moms turn to 'Dr. Google' for pregnancy advice

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Pregnant women are using the Internet to seek answers to their medical questions more often than they would like, say Penn State researchers.

"We found that first-time moms were upset that their first prenatal visit did not occur until eight weeks into pregnancy," said Jennifer L. Kraschnewski, assistant professor of medicine and public health sciences, Penn State College of Medicine. "These women reported using Google and other search engines because they had a lot of questions at the beginning of pregnancy, before their first doctor's appointment."

Following the women's first visit to the obstetrician, many of them still turned to the Internet—in the form of both search engines and social media—to find answers to their questions, because they felt the literature the doctor's office gave them was insufficient.

Despite the rapid evolution of technology, the structure of prenatal care has changed little over the past century in the U.S., the researchers said.

Kraschnewski and colleagues set out to gather information to develop a [smartphone app](#) for women to use during pregnancy, and incidentally discovered that many women were unsatisfied with the structure of their [prenatal care](#).

The researchers conducted four focus groups, totaling 17 [pregnant women](#)—all of whom were over 18 and owned a smartphone. Most of the mothers-to-be agreed that the structure of prenatal visits are not

responsive to their individual needs, so they turned to technology to fill their knowledge gaps, Kraschnewski and colleagues reported in a recent issue of the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. However, the women were unsatisfied by the questionable accuracy of the information they found online.

Many of the participants found the pamphlets and flyers that their doctors gave them, as well as the once popular book "What to Expect When You're Expecting," outdated and preferred receiving information in different formats. They would rather watch videos and use social media and pregnancy-tracking apps and websites.

"This research is important because we don't have a very good handle on what tools pregnant [women](#) are using and how they engage with technology," said Kraschnewski, also an affiliate of the Penn State Institute for Diabetes and Obesity. "We have found that there is a real disconnect between what we're providing in the office and what the patient wants."

She pointed out that regulation of medical information on the Internet is rare, which could be problematic and lead to alarming patients unnecessarily. The researchers cited a 2008 study that found of the millions of websites that surface when searching for common [pregnancy](#) terms, less than 4 percent were created or sponsored by physicians.

"Moving forward, in providing medical care we need to figure out how we can provide valid information to patients," said Kraschnewski. "We need to find sound resources on the Internet or develop our own sources."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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