

# Pregnant women not following nutrition guidelines

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Researchers from the University of Adelaide have made a remarkable discovery: no pregnant women were found to be correctly following the Australian Dietary Guidelines on consumption of the "five food groups", despite almost two-thirds of pregnant women believing they were eating the right diet.

The study, now published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*, surveyed the [dietary habits](#) of more than 850 pregnant women from across Australia.

The research was conducted by Dr Lenka Malek for her PhD at the University of Adelaide's Women's & Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI), in conjunction with the School of Agriculture, Food & Wine and Global Food Studies.

"The results are rather alarming – we were expecting to see at least some pregnant women correctly following the guidelines across all food groups, but there were none," says Dr Malek, who is now a postdoctoral research fellow in Global Food Studies at the University.

The research showed that only 56% of pregnant women consumed the daily recommendation of fruit, 29% consumed enough dairy, and less than 10% ate the recommended levels of other food groups: vegetables, grains and lean meats.

"One of our main concerns is that 61% of pregnant women thought they were eating a healthy and balanced diet," Dr Malek says.

"If pregnant women already believe they are consuming a healthy and balanced diet they may not make changes to improve their eating habits. These results help to illustrate the need for greater awareness of what is considered to be a healthy diet, and a need for intervention programs aimed at helping [pregnant women](#) to meet the guidelines."

Senior author on the paper Dr Jo Zhou, a dietician from the School of Agriculture, Food & Wine and WCHRI at the University, says the research has implications for the understanding of women's health generally.

"Our research has found some groups of women are less likely to eat certain types of foods," Dr Zhou says.

"For example, women who were born overseas and who were less physically active before pregnancy were less likely to keep to the daily fruit and dairy recommendations. Women who smoked during pregnancy, were overweight before pregnancy and had lower household incomes were also less likely to eat enough fruit. And women living in metropolitan areas were less likely to meet the daily intake of vegetables.

"More research would be needed to better understand exactly why women aren't consuming certain types of foods at the recommended levels. But there is a very clear need to raise awareness of this problem in the community," she says.

**More information:** "Adherence to the Australian dietary guidelines during pregnancy: evidence from a national study." *Public Health Nutrition* DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980015002232](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980015002232)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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