Determinants of Health Behaviors After Gestational Diabetes Mellitus: A Prospective Cohort Study in Geneva

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Abstract
Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is one of the most common complications in pregnancy. The objective of this study was to specify the determinants of postpartum physical activity and dietary habits after a pregnancy complicated by GDM in a population of Swiss women. This information will be used to improve health promotion and diabetes prevention interventions for women with a history of GDM.

Reference

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INTRODUCTION

Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM), defined as glucose intolerance occurring or diagnosed for the first time during pregnancy, is one of the most common complications in pregnancy. Epidemiologic studies show that this disorder currently affects 2% to 18% of women during pregnancy, depending on population and diagnostic criteria. In European populations, the average prevalence of GDM is in the order of 2% to 6%; however, currently in Switzerland it is approximately 10%.5

The risk of developing type 2 diabetes is up to 7 times higher in women with a history of GDM,6 and up to two-thirds of these women present with recurring GDM in subsequent pregnancies.7 These high-risk women should therefore be educated about the importance of following a basic healthy lifestyle so as to prevent the onset of diabetes after childbirth. This includes highlighting the need for regular physical activity (ie, moderate activity for at least 30 minutes/day, 5 days a week or strenuous exercise for at least 20 minutes/day, 3 days a week) and consumption of a balanced diet, including the recommendation to eat at least 5 servings of fruits and/or vegetables per day. A diet that is low in sugar, salt, and fat should also be recommended.8 This is also important given the impact that a healthy lifestyle will have on the woman’s family since children of women with diabetes are at greater risk of obesity and diabetes.9,10

A recent systematic review of studies that have evaluated the determinants of postpartum health behavior in women who have had GDM indicates a lack of adherence to lifestyle recommendations to prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes.11 This review also found that a lack of knowledge about prevention strategies, lack of motivation, and a low perception of risk to oneself to develop diabetes in the future had an adverse impact on adoption of a healthy lifestyle in the postpartum period after GDM. Other factors that could be involved include beliefs about health behaviors (eg, advantages, barriers, social influences), social support (ie, the actual and/or available instrumental and emotional support received by women specific to health-related behaviors),12 and self-efficacy (ie, the extent or strength of belief in one’s own ability to complete health-related behaviors).13,14

There are, therefore, a number of factors influencing the adoption of preventive behaviors by women who have had GDM. However, studies conducted to date on this subject were systematically cross-sectional and often retrospective in nature, thus presenting considerable limitations in terms of scope of the data. To date, no study has combined these factors within the same protocol; therefore, this is the aim of the present study. Our main objective was to identify the associated factors and determinants of postpartum physical activity and dietary habits after a pregnancy complicated by GDM, in a population of women living in Switzerland, in order to improve health promotion interventions for women with a history of GDM.
Six months after giving birth, 63% of women with a history of GDM exhibit eating habits and a level of physical activity that is not in keeping with optimal prevention of diabetes.

Two factors come into play for establishing healthy attitudes for the postpartum period 6 months after GDM: social support and the number of perceived barriers in attaining the desired health measures.

For women who have had GDM, we envision the provision of postpartum care through a network of health services revolving around personalized dietary support, as well as engagement in physical activities adapted to individual women’s constraints.

**METHODS**

A prospective cohort study was conducted between November 2011 and June 2013 during prenatal consultations held by midwives and obstetricians at Geneva University Hospital. This hospital is located in the French part of Switzerland and has an average of 4000 births each year. A convenience sample of 173 pregnant women was recruited between 30 and 36 weeks’ gestation. Women were eligible for inclusion in the study on the basis of their medical records if they had a diagnosis of GDM in the current pregnancy but had not previously been diagnosed with either type 1 or type 2 diabetes; if they were aged 18 years or older; and if they could read, write, and speak French. Women who had a history of GDM in another pregnancy in addition to having GDM in the index pregnancy were included in the study. The population was composed of women of several different ethnicities, in line with the melting pot of the Geneva resident population. This study was approved by the Geneva University Hospital Central Commission of Ethics and Research in 2011 (project 11-083). For the complete protocol, please see Kaiser, Razurel, and Jeannot.15

**Recruitment Strategies**

Women were recruited at their diabetes consultation by 2 midwives, one of which was the first author. In Geneva, all women diagnosed with GDM attend a weekly obstetric, dietary, and diabetes checkup from the time of GDM diagnosis, which occurs at approximately 24 to 28 weeks’ gestation, until they give birth. Although some of these women are followed by independent practitioners, all women who will give birth in the Geneva University Hospital maternity unit are required to have this consultation near the end of their pregnancy, at around 36 weeks’ gestation or more. Recruitment was therefore carried out between 30 and 36 weeks’ gestation.

**Study Procedures**

Quantitative data were collected from study participants at the time of recruitment (T1) and at 6 months postpartum (T3). Data from T2 (6 weeks postpartum) are not reported in this article. The participants signed an informed consent form at T1 and filled out the initial questionnaires. Baseline information about socioeconomic, personal medical, and obstetric history was obtained through an interviewer-administered questionnaire. At T3, questionnaires were sent by post with a prestamped envelope for return. A reminder by telephone and/or by e-mail was carried out in the event of no response. All of the questionnaires were beta tested with 10 women to evaluate acceptability and understanding. No particular difficulty was identified, and the test period was estimated to take approximately 10 minutes to complete at T1 and 20 minutes at T3.

**Measures at T1**

**Motivation to Adopt a Healthy Lifestyle After Birth**

Participants’ motivation, that is, their predisposition to lead a healthy lifestyle in the postpartum period, was evaluated at T1 using one item from the Rapid Eating and Activity Assessment for Participants, short version (REAP-S) questionnaire.16 The wording of this question was adapted to suit a population of women at the end of their pregnancy as follows: “After your delivery, to what extent are you willing to adopt a lifestyle (diet, physical activity) that will allow you to stay in good health?” The possible answers ranged from 1 (not willing) to 5 (highly willing).

**Clinical and Sociodemographic Variables**

An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to capture baseline information on age, body mass index (BMI, calculated as the weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared) before pregnancy, race/ethnicity, highest educational level completed, employment status, number of children, history of GDM, and family history of diabetes.

**Measures at T3**

**Health Behaviors**

To evaluate participants’ lifestyles (dietary habits and physical activity) at 6 months postpartum, we used the REAPS.16 This is a short questionnaire consisting of 15 items—13 for diet, and 2 for physical activity—which was originally intended to evaluate dietary habits and physical activity in persons with prediabetes. The questionnaire was built to be understandable regardless of participants’ level of education. For each item corresponding to a lifestyle habit, the participant answers the question, “In a normal week, how many times do you . . . ?” Possible answers are on a scale from 0 (usually, often), 1 (sometimes), to 2 (rarely, never). Possible scores ranged from 0 to 30. A score of less than 15 corresponds to a low
adherence to guidelines for a healthy lifestyle, as recommended by the American Diabetes Association.8

**Diabetic Risk Perception for Oneself**

Participants’ risk perception for developing diabetes in the future was measured by an item extracted from the Risk Perception Survey for Developing Diabetes (RPS-DD)17,18, “In your opinion, what is your level of risk of developing diabetes in the next 10 years?” The scores ranged from 1 (almost no risk) to 4 (maximum risk).

**Knowledge About Diabetes Risk Factors and Preventive Strategies**

A corresponding 10-item subscale of the RPS-DD was used to assess participants’ knowledge of diabetes risk factors and preventive strategies. For each item, participants check one of 4 possible responses: “increases risk,” “has no effect on risk,” “reduces risk,” or “don’t know.” Each incorrect answer or “don’t know” response corresponds to a score of 0, and each correct answer corresponds to a score of 1. Total scores ranged from 0 to 10.

**Social Support**

To evaluate perceived level of social support, we revised a scale developed by Sallis et al,12 which specifically relates to physical activity and healthy eating, by adding items related to participants’ perception of the assistance they receive in terms of child care and housework because these factors have been identified as having a major influence, particularly on physical activity in women.19 For each of the 8 items on the scale (4 relating to physical activity and 4 relating to diet), participants were asked, “In general, how often do one or more people in your life (eg, your partner, family, friends, or others) …?” Responses ranged from 0 (rarely, never) to 2 (usually, often) and possible total scores ranged from 0 to 16.

**Self-Efficacy**

Participants’ feelings of self-efficacy in terms of their own health behaviors were measured using a modified version of the scale developed by Marcus et al,14 which has good retest reliability.20 Participants were asked to what degree they feel capable on a scale of 1 (not at all capable) to 5 (very capable) of partaking in physical activity and adopting a healthy diet in 5 different situations: 1) when they feel tired, 2) when they are in a bad mood, 3) when they have little time, 4) when they are on holiday, and 5) when they find it requires too much effort. This scale contains 10 items (5 for physical activity, 5 for diet). The possible range of scores was 10 to 50.

**Health Beliefs**

In agreement with Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior,21 participants’ beliefs about their own health behaviors (physical activity and healthy diet) were evaluated using 12 questions (6 for each target health behavior) constructed according to Ajzen’s guidelines.22 This questionnaire evaluates the perceived advantages of behaviors, normative influence (ie, the people who have the most influence on whether a person adopts or does not adopt these behaviors), the perceived barriers that prevent these behaviors from being adopted, and the facilitators for the behaviors. The questions are open by nature, for example, “According to you, what are the main advantages to partaking in regular physical activity?” All of the health beliefs thus identified were used to establish a qualitative list of the most commonly held beliefs about physical activity and diet in the study population. Quantitative analysis concerned perceived advantages and barriers. The number of beliefs for each dimension was taken into account (eg, number of perceived barriers for physical exercise + number of perceived barriers for healthy diet = number of healthy lifestyle barriers).

**Statistical Methods**

Descriptive statistics, one sample $t$-test and chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses, were used to compare the distribution of characteristics between 2 groups of participants, categorized according to their level of adherence to a healthy lifestyle: participants with a REAP-S score 15 or higher versus participants with a REAP-S score lower than 15.8,16

Bivariate logistic regression analysis was conducted to assess associations between REAP-S scores at 6 months postpartum and motivation to adopt healthy lifestyle after birth measured at the end of pregnancy, clinical and sociodemographic characteristics, and postulated psychosocial correlates of health behaviors. Multivariate logistic regression included all significant ($P < .05$) results from the bivariate analysis.

The Tabachnick & Fidell23 formula was used to calculate the power of the sample size. For an alpha probability of .05 and a power of .80, the recommended sample size (N) to correctly evaluate the predictor variables (m) in a multivariate logistic regression is: N = 50 + 8 m. In our study, 6 postulated psychosocial predictors of health behaviors after GDM could be considered: motivation to adopt a healthy lifestyle after birth, diabetic risk perception for oneself, knowledge about diabetes risk factors and preventive strategies, social support, self-efficacy, and health beliefs. It was therefore necessary to have at least 98 participants, and 173 participants were recruited. Moreover, the power of the test is acceptable when the ratio “number of participants/number of predictor variables” is greater than or equal to 15, which is the case with our sample size (173/6 = 28.8).

**RESULTS**

Out of 200 women who were eligible for this study, 173 agreed to participate, so the response rate was 86.5%. Fifty-one women were lost at follow-up, but 122 completed the study by sending back the questionnaires 6 months after giving birth, which represents a dropout rate of 29.4%. There were no statistically significant differences between women who left the study and those who completed the questionnaires at T3 ($P > .05$ for clinical, sociodemographic variables, and for Motivation to Adopt a Healthy Lifestyle After Delivery).

Participants’ characteristics, according to their level of adherence to a healthy lifestyle 6 months after birth, are shown in Table 1. There were several statistically significant differences between participants with a REAP-S score 15 or...
### Table 1. Comparison of Characteristics Between Participants Categorized Into 2 Groups According to Their Level of Adherence to Healthy Lifestyle at 6 Months Postpartum (REAP-S ≥ 15 Versus REAP-S < 15; N = 122)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>REAP-S &lt; 15</th>
<th>REAP-S ≥ 15</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants, n (%)</td>
<td>122 (100)</td>
<td>77 (63.2)</td>
<td>45 (36.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REAP-S, mean (SD)</td>
<td>8.16 (9.86)</td>
<td>1.12 (3.62)</td>
<td>20.2 (3.02)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age, mean (SD), y</td>
<td>33.6 (5.36)</td>
<td>32.8 (5.89)</td>
<td>34.6 (4.16)</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI before pregnancy, mean (SD), kg/m²</td>
<td>26.3 (5.66)</td>
<td>28.5 (6.08)</td>
<td>24.2 (3.59)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African, n (%)</td>
<td>35 (28.6)</td>
<td>25 (32.4)</td>
<td>10 (22.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, n (%)</td>
<td>9 (7.3)</td>
<td>8 (10.3)</td>
<td>1 (2.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic, n (%)</td>
<td>28 (22.9)</td>
<td>20 (25.9)</td>
<td>8 (17.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, n (%)</td>
<td>50 (40.9)</td>
<td>24 (31.2)</td>
<td>26 (57.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest educational level completed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior high school or lower, n (%)</td>
<td>67 (55)</td>
<td>55 (71.2)</td>
<td>12 (26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree or equivalent, n (%)</td>
<td>55 (45)</td>
<td>22 (28.8)</td>
<td>33 (74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of GDM besides the index pregnancy, n (%)</td>
<td>14 (11.4)</td>
<td>9 (11.7)</td>
<td>5 (11.1)</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family history of diabetes, n (%)</td>
<td>67 (55)</td>
<td>40 (52)</td>
<td>27 (60)</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed, n (%)</td>
<td>79 (64.7)</td>
<td>39 (50.7)</td>
<td>40 (88.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed, n (%)</td>
<td>43 (35.2)</td>
<td>38 (49.3)</td>
<td>5 (12.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child, n (%)</td>
<td>51 (41.8)</td>
<td>25 (32)</td>
<td>26 (57.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children, n (%)</td>
<td>48 (39.3)</td>
<td>34 (44)</td>
<td>14 (31.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more, n (%)</td>
<td>23 (18.8)</td>
<td>18 (24)</td>
<td>5 (12.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to adopt healthy lifestyle after birth, mean (SD)(^a)</td>
<td>4.06 (0.93)</td>
<td>4.03 (1.01)</td>
<td>4.09 (0.81)</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic risk perception for oneself, mean (SD)(^b)</td>
<td>2.08 (0.95)</td>
<td>1.34 (0.7)</td>
<td>2.82 (0.8)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge of diabetes prevention strategies and risk factors, mean (SD)(^c)</td>
<td>6.2 (1.75)</td>
<td>6.09 (1.39)</td>
<td>6.36 (1.54)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support, mean (SD)(^d)</td>
<td>8.3 (4.61)</td>
<td>0.59 (2.43)</td>
<td>7.78 (3.82)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy, mean (SD)(^e)</td>
<td>12.5 (1.12)</td>
<td>14 (1.09)</td>
<td>11 (0.86)</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of reported healthy lifestyle advantages, mean (SD)</td>
<td>2.46 (0.88)</td>
<td>2.31 (0.7)</td>
<td>2.61 (1.10)</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of reported healthy lifestyle barriers, mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.65)</td>
<td>0.67 (0.81)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.38)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: BMI, body mass index; GDM, gestational diabetes mellitus; REAP-S, Rapid Eating and Activity Assessment for Participants short version; SD, standard deviation.

\(^a\) One item with scores ranging from 1 (not willing) to 5 (highly willing).

\(^b\) One item with scores ranging from 1 (almost no risk) to 4 (maximum risk).

\(^c\) 10-item scale with 0 = incorrect answer or “don’t know” and 1 = correct answer. Total scores range from 0 to 10.

\(^d\) 9-item scale with answers ranging from 0 (rarely, never) to 2 (usually, often) and total scores ranging from 0 to 16.

\(^e\) Participants are asked to what degree they feel capable (on a scale of 1 [not at all capable] to 5 [very capable]) of partaking in physical activity and adopting a healthy diet; total scores range from 10 to 50.

Higher and participants with a REAP-S score lower than 15. Specifically, those with a REAP-S score lower than 15 had a higher BMI before pregnancy, a lower level of education, a lower risk perception for themselves for developing diabetes in the future, a lower level of social support, were more frequently unemployed, and reported more barriers to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. It is notable that at T1, the women in both groups exhibited the same level of motivation to adopt a healthy lifestyle after giving birth (4.03 vs 4.09, \(P = .73\) out of a range of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating “highly willing”) while at 6 months postpartum only 45 (36.8%) of them exhibited behaviors that were compatible with prevention of type 2 diabetes (REAP-S score ≥ 15).

In terms of health attitudes for the entire sample, the main perceived advantages of healthy behaviors were weight loss (77%) and promotion of good health (68%); the main normative influences were husband/partner (81%) and other family members (56%). For the women in the group with a low adherence to a healthy lifestyle, the main barriers were no time (83%), taking care of children (69%), no idea of what to do/eat (64%), and fatigue (31%). Regarding facilitators, they expressed a need for personalized advice (65%), and to be able to exercise in sports facilities where their children can be looked after (69%), and/or that involve other women who have recently given birth (53%). For the women in the group with suitable adherence to a healthy lifestyle, the main
barriers were professional activity (34%) and time spent taking care of the infant/the family (31%). The main facilitator was work less (63%).

Bivariate regression analysis found that lower level of education, to be unemployed, lower diabetic risk perception for oneself, lower level of social support, and more perceived barriers to a healthy lifestyle were significantly associated with a low adherence to healthy lifestyle after GDM (Table 2). In contrast, after controlling for individual factors that were significant, the multivariate regressions found that only 2 variables were determinants in the low adherence to healthy lifestyle in the postpartum period after GDM: lower level of social support (odds ratio [OR], 1.5; 95% confidence interval [CI], 1.4–1.7; P < .001), and more perceived barriers to a healthy lifestyle (OR, 1.2; 95% CI, 1.08–1.6; P = .002). However, this model explains only 41% of the variance in adoption of health behaviors among the women in this study.

**DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this research was to identify the factors determining whether women who have recently had GDM have adopted a healthy lifestyle during the postpartum period.

The results showed that 6 months after giving birth, 63% of the women in this sample reported eating habits and a level of physical activity that was not consistent with optimal prevention of diabetes. This level of adherence to a healthy lifestyle was very similar to that seen in women within the general Swiss population, since 38% claim to have healthy eating habits, and 34% to 41% regularly engage in a physical activity. Given the demonstrated higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the population of women who have had GDM, this level of postnatal health-enhancing lifestyle is somewhat alarming. Furthermore, it is possible that the level of physical activity for this sample was an overestimation. The REAP-S used 2 items to assess physical activity in terms of duration and frequency, and by means of sedentary time that was objectified by reporting the time spent watching television. In an Australian study assessing the level of postpartum physical activity following GDM, the notion of the intensity of the physical activity was also taken into account, thereby revealing a lower level of physical activity among women who had GDM compared to women in the general population.

This study provides evidence that the lack of adherence to health behaviors to prevent the occurrence of type 2 diabetes among women who have had GDM is linked primarily with a lack of social support and with a number of perceived barriers. The main problem stems from a lack of available resources to establish healthy eating habits and inability to participate in regular physical activity. These results corroborate those of 2 studies previously focusing on social support conditions associated with postpartum health behaviors after GDM among women living in the United States. Social support—especially from family and friends—was proved to be associated with family dietary habits, available time for meal preparation, and an adequate level of physical activity. Moreover, a more recent Australian study conducted among women who had experienced GDM 6 months to 3 years earlier found that social support was a key factor for the adoption of an adequate level of physical activity after GDM (OR, 1.06; 95% CI, 1.03–1.09).

The women reported moderate motivation to adopt healthy eating habits and regular physical activity after giving birth at the end of pregnancy (mean score = 4.06 out of 5 for the full sample), no matter what their behavior was at 6 months postpartum. The message regarding diabetes prevention and health promotion, therefore, appears to be getting across during their treatment of GDM. Thus, the women's motivation does not seem to be a determining factor in affecting postpartum behaviors. The multivariate analysis, on the other hand, indicated that only 2 factors, social support and perceived barriers, affected establishing healthy behaviors during the 6-month postpartum period. The main barriers given by the women with a REAP-S score lower than 15 were no time, taking care of children, no idea of what to do/eat, and fatigue. One could assume that these variables are directly linked to the level of daily social support for these women. No time and taking care of children are indicative of a lack of instrumental social support, and no idea of what to do/eat is indicative of a lack of informational social support. Moreover, concerning the no time barrier, it is important to know that in Geneva, the maternity leave lasts 14 weeks, so at 6 months postpartum women who work outside of home have returned to work.

One could assume that the no idea of what to do/eat barrier was associated with a lack of knowledge regarding preventive diabetes measures. However, this is not the case.

**Table 2. Determinants of Low Adherence to Healthy Lifestyle After GDM, as Analyzed by Bivariate and Multivariate Logistic Regression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Bivariate Logistic Regression</th>
<th>Multivariate Logistic Regression&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Odds ratio (95% CI) P Value</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body mass index before pregnancy</td>
<td>0.9 (0.7–1.1) .58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree or equivalent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior high school or lower</td>
<td>5.9 (2.6–13.2) &lt;.001</td>
<td>0.4 (0.07–2.01) .25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0.13 (0.03–0.4) &lt;.001</td>
<td>0.10 (0.01–1) .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower diabetic risk perception for oneself</td>
<td>6.6 (3.6–11.9) .01</td>
<td>1.9 (0.6–5.9) .32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower level of social support</td>
<td>1.87 (1.5–2.2) &lt;.001</td>
<td>1.5 (1.4–1.7) &lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More perceived barriers to a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>1.9 (1.6–2.4) &lt;.001</td>
<td>1.2 (1.08–1.5) .002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Controlled variables for multivariate analysis: BMI.
because the participants in the 2 groups had a similar level of knowledge in this area (6.09 vs 6.36 out of 10, \( P = .85 \)). However, the nature of the items in the questionnaire about their knowledge may explain the lack-of-knowledge barrier. The items on the Risk Perception Survey for Developing Diabetes questionnaire concern general knowledge regarding the need to adopt healthy eating habits and to regularly engage in physical activity, and also knowledge about which populations are at risk of developing diabetes (eg, people of certain ethnic origins, family history of diabetes, prior GDM). This knowledge does not relate to exact behavioral health modalities such as what types of food to eat, what size portions, what physical activities to engage in, and how often per week.

The majority of the participants appeared to know that having had GDM is a risk factor for diabetes. Despite this, the participants had a low risk perception for themselves for developing diabetes in the future (mean score = 2.08 out of 4 for the full sample), no matter what their level of adherence to a healthy lifestyle was. A phenomenon of comparative optimism is also noted (ie, the belief that adverse events are more likely to occur with others than oneself).29 In the multivariate analysis, the perception of risk for oneself did not appear to be a factor that determines postpartum health attitudes after GDM, although it would nonetheless be interesting to explore this phenomenon in future studies.

Finally, counter to other studies on this subject,27,30–32 the results of our study did not provide evidence for an impact of self-efficacy on the adoption of postpartum health behaviors after GDM. In most of the studies that have evaluated self-efficacy, it was measured using specific scales for physical activity27,30,31 or specific for food intake.30,32 It is possible that our adapted questionnaire, designed to measure self-efficacy both for physical activity and food intake, might not be sensitive enough.

One strength of this study is that unlike many studies on the subject,11 generalizing the present results to other populations—including US populations—becomes possible because of the high ethnic, educational, and economic mix among the participants. This constitutes an important issue to the extent that in the United States, there is an inverse relationship between economic status and prevalence of type 2 diabetes especially.24

One limitation of our study is that the self-report measure of health behaviors could be influenced by social desirability. In addition, health behaviors of women who dropped out or declined to participate may have been more optimal for decreasing the risk of diabetes.

Finally, we chose not to include analysis of breastfeeding status for 2 reasons. The first is methodologic: The aim of the study was to assess the determinants of postpartum health behaviors recommended by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) following a pregnancy complicated by GDM, and breastfeeding is not part of these specific recommendations. ACOG suggests that “individuals at increased risk should be counseled regarding diet, exercise, and weight reduction or maintenance to forestall or prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes.”33 The second reason is related to the specific situation of Switzerland regarding breastfeeding. Breastfeeding rates are very high in this country; it is 94% in hospital discharge, the rate being maintained on average up to 31 weeks after childbirth.33 We therefore considered that this variable would not discriminate women in the cohort despite the fact that breastfeeding appears to be a protective factor against type 2 diabetes.33

CONCLUSIONS AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

A pregnancy complicated by GDM must be viewed as a prime opportunity to promote health. In this context, midwives can play a crucial role in preventing diabetes in general, especially because a woman’s healthy lifestyle has a positive influence on the health of her children and spouse. Women who have had GDM should be educated in the importance of following health and dietary measures in the same way that they are taught about the importance of monitoring their blood glucose level. To address the lack of resources described by this population, a partnership could be established between midwives, dietitians, physicians, and exercise professionals. For women who have had GDM, we envision the provision of postpartum care through a network of health services revolving around personalized dietary support, as well as engagement in physical activities adapted to women’s constraints (eg, care of young children).

Interventions based on various strategies derived from Social Cognitive Theory could also potentially be effective for increasing health behaviors among postpartum women after GDM. According to Social Cognitive Theory, there are multiple influences on behavior, including social factors.34 Behavioral strategies based on Social Cognitive Theory include increasing social support (ie, eliciting support from family and friends), enjoyment of the behavior, and outcome expectancies, which refer to the degree to which the individual believes behaviors will lead to a particular outcome. It could be a telephone-based intervention, because non-face-to-face interventions may be ideal due to time constraints, child-care conflicts, and transportation constraints sometimes present for women during the postpartum period.35 Those interventions could maximize the impact of the advice given and improve adherence to health recommendations.

However, the perception of risk remains an open question awaiting further research of educational health interventions centered on this concept. Research in this area should be carried out in the postpartum period after GDM. The clinical implications of this study therefore relate to the means and resources required during the postpartum period so that all women who have had GDM have ample access to suitable relevant advice during postnatal follow-up.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors, have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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