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Investigating the Transition to Parenting within a Digital Health Context

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Background:
The ubiquity of digital technology use created the need to understand parents’ digital technology use in pre-conception, pregnancy and the postpartum period (the transition to parenting). This research investigated the role of digital technology in the lives of individuals in the transition to parenting.

Methods:
A qualitative descriptive study used purposive sampling. Participants were eligible if they were new parents, up to 2 years postpartum, were 16-35 years old, and English speaking. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed; thematic data analysis was used.

Results:
26 participants identified as heterosexual females reported prolific use of digital technologies to direct fertility (e.g., ovulation timing), for information seeking regarding foetal growth and development, to prepare for labour and delivery, and in searching for a sense of community during postpartum. Smartphone technologies, social media, and prenatal apps were predominantly used. Participants expressed concerns related to their personal patterns of use, and the potential negative impacts. Themes included: “Is this normal; is this happening to you??”, “Am I having a heart attack; what is this??”, “Anyone can put anything on Wikipedia”: Managing the Negative Impacts of Digital Information.
Conclusions:
Digitally informed parenting practices include enhanced access to information regarding normal infant growth and development. Immediacy of information access was valued over integrity. Important implications of this work relate to the need for effective digital health literacy skills. Future research on the gendered use of digital technologies among parents is needed.

Key messages:
- Digital technology use creates important health implications for pre and post-natal care among parents.
- Digital technology use is requisite for prenatal public health education.