

TECH IN MEDICINE

PregSource:

Using input from pregnant people to uncover the secrets of pregnancy



What is PregSource?

[PregSource®: Crowdsourcing to Understand Pregnancy](#) is a research project that collects data about pregnancy from the early stages through birth directly from pregnant people. Participants are invited to share information such as their health history, changes in weight and sleep patterns, and labor and delivery experiences using confidential online surveys. [The PregSource resource library](#) provides information from NIH and other trustworthy sources to answer pregnancy-related questions.

The project is led by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Since its launch in 2017, the project has received data from more than 2,000 pregnant people.

Why was it created?

Even though many people across the globe experience a pregnancy in their lifetimes, there's still a lot scientists don't know about what a typical pregnancy looks like. For example:

- How many people experience morning sickness? When in their pregnancy does it start or stop?
- How does pregnancy affect sleep and energy levels?
- Are there warning signs for pregnancy complications? If so, when are they detectable?

“Very little is known about what a typical person in the 21st century can expect from a pregnancy,” says NICHD’s [Caroline Signore](#), M.D., M.P.H., who leads the PregSource project. “Much of pregnancy research focuses on problems. While we have learned a great

deal about preventing and treating certain pregnancy complications, we know comparatively little about the everyday, lived experiences of pregnant people.

The PregSource project aims to fill these knowledge gaps and provide data that informs guidance and recommendations for maintaining a healthy pregnancy.

The PregSource project incorporates newer crowdsourcing techniques to gather information about pregnancy experiences from pregnant people, rather than relying on health care providers to collect the data. The study’s confidential, secure online platform allows participants to add their information from any place, at any time.

IMAGE: COURTESY OF PREGSOURCE

Who can join PregSource?

Any pregnant person between ages 18 and 70 can participate in the PregSource research project. It’s free to join, participants can decide which questions they want to answer, and they can opt out at any time. Users can input information on their own schedules, preferably at least once a month.

How are the data used?

Right now, the study is in a data collection stage. After this stage of the study ends next year, the dataset will be made freely available to researchers through NICHD’s [Data and Specimen Hub](#). Researchers will be able to use the grouped data to look for trends, similarities, and differences in people’s pregnancy experiences.

To protect users’ privacy, all data has names and other identifying information removed. Only PregSource coordinators see personal information, and they are trained to protect user privacy and keep data secure.

What’s next for PregSource?

As of December 2021, PregSource is available as an [app](#) for Apple devices as well as in an online format. Having PregSource easily available on a smart device makes it easier for pregnant people to give updates on their own schedules. An “award” system, in which users earn badges for making a certain number of entries in a week, is also new in the app. ■

IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

PregSource resource library: Answers to pregnancy questions at your fingertips

[PregSource®: Crowdsourcing to Understand Pregnancy](#) includes a resource library where users can search keywords and find answers to their pregnancy questions from trusted health resources like NIH; CDC; the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; and the Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses. Here are some of the topics you can learn more about through the library:

Morning sickness

[One article](#) from the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health explains that ginger helps reduce mild nausea and vomiting associated with pregnancy.

Eating for two

Although the Institute of Medicine recommends that expectant mothers need to eat more during pregnancy, most women only need [roughly 300 extra calories](#) a day—about the same caloric content as a plain bagel with cream cheese.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is beneficial for babies and can reduce the risk of [sudden infant death syndrome](#) (SIDS), as well as [obesity in childhood and adulthood](#). But the [Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#) says it benefits moms, too. Breastfeeding can help the uterus heal and reduce the risk of postpartum depression.

