

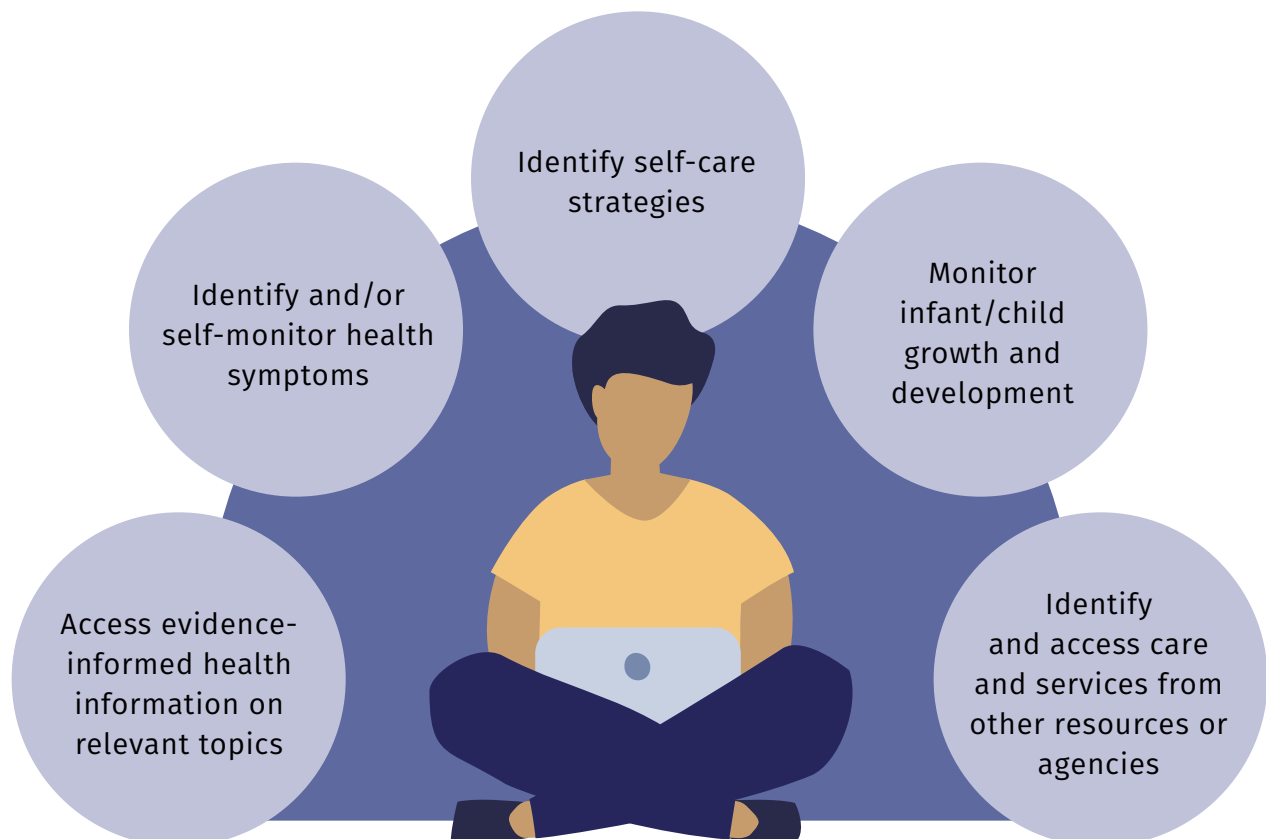


Using Health Applications with Clients who are Pregnant or Parenting

Individuals who are pregnant or parenting young children often access websites or use health applications or “apps” on tablets, phones, or computers to track symptoms, access health information, or monitor key milestones during pregnancy and parenting. While decisions to recommend specific health apps will differ by health unit, public health nurses are well-positioned to provide guidance to their clients about how and when to use health apps. This resource provides practical guidance and strategies to support public health nurses whose clients may be using health apps and highlights how health apps can complement nursing practice.

“When” you might use web-based or mobile health apps with clients

Health apps can be used in different ways to augment the work of public health nurses. There may be times when public health nurses may review or recommend apps to clients to:



“How” you might use web-based or mobile health apps with clients

There are multiple ways that apps can be used as a tool or resource to enhance a public health nurse’s professional practice. The goal is not to have a web-based resource or app replace the specialized knowledge and skills that a public health nurse brings to the therapeutic relationship, but to use these resources to augment practice or to support clients to be able to critically appraise the quality of the information they access online.

Assessment

- Access to electronic versions of “fillable” assessment or screening tools.
- Complete assessment in collaboration with the client or review it with them if it is their preference to complete the assessment independently or repeat in the future [e.g., the Looksee Checklist or the General Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) or the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), both found on the [MomsOverMatter](#) web application].
- When there is limited privacy in a home visit or a lack of physical safety (e.g., if a woman is experiencing intimate partner violence), use of an online assessment tool where the client can confidentially fill out the information provides an alternate way for public health nurses to access important assessment or screening data.

Nursing Diagnosis

- Access to tools to facilitate scoring or interpretation of assessment or screening data [e.g., Ages & Stages Questionnaire® (ASQ®) calculator; Danger Assessment score sheet].
- Access valid and reliable evidence (often in the form of best-practice guidelines, systematic reviews) through credible organizations (e.g., professional nursing associations) to guide clinical decision-making.

Planning and Intervention

- Access point-of-care searchable information (e.g., drug monographs) to inform planning.
- Facilitate planning and client decision-making through the use of clinical decision support aids (e.g., interactive “apps” that allow women experiencing intimate partner violence to develop a tailored safety plan).
- Overcome barriers to communication through the use of speech-to-text or text-to-speech, translation applications etc.
- Locate credible information to share and augment health education.
- Enhance client self-efficacy to conduct self-assessments, locate and use valuable information to independently address health concerns, including location and accessing of information about community resources and supports.

Practical Tips and Considerations

Safety

With increased use of mobile health apps comes increased risk for clients' personal health information to be inadvertently or carelessly disclosed¹. In Canada, personal health information collected by app manufacturers is essentially unregulated². It is important to understand what permissions and access are being requested prior to installing an app. Nurses can review an app's privacy policy with the client and ensure appropriate privacy settings have been activated, particularly in situations where safety is at risk. Nurses can review different strategies with clients to help them protect any of their personal health information that an app may store on their mobile device.

If a client is using an app related to safety planning and intimate partner violence, explore strategies for safely exiting the web-based application or deleting the app.

Assess the financial burden of the apps with the client to determine if there are better or more accessible options. Review with clients how to remove their financial information and cancel paid apps when necessary.

Assess client responses to, or understanding of, online content

- Be sensitive to client reactions to online information.
- Check in to assess how the information complements (or conflicts) with their existing understanding of an issue or topic.
- Explore with the client what information makes sense to them... or what information requires additional explanation or contextualization.
- Clients may experience increasing anxiety if their personal experience/ situation is different from what is described or illustrated on an app. If this occurs, help to contextualize and tailor the information to their situation. For example, some infant feeding trackers may encourage clients to continue to monitor feeding amounts and duration even when it is not necessary and may potentially be doing harm.

Apps will never be a substitute for clinical nursing judgment.

Not all health apps will provide reliable information, and this can pose risks to the client's health outcomes. The rapid growth and commercialization of the health app market has increased the risk of using an app that is not reliable or evidence-based¹. Nurses can assess the quality of apps using [Supporting Clients to Assess the Quality of Health Care Apps](#).

Tips to help keep personal health information secure



Use a strong password



Think before sharing any health information from an app on social media



Protect your mobile device by using only trusted

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