

Protect Your Baby Before You Are Pregnant
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Are you considering having a baby or are between the childbearing ages of 14-50? Did you know that half of all pregnancies are unplanned? Whether you're planning a new addition to your family or simply the age at which you could potentially become pregnant, think about adding a folic acid supplement to your daily routine.

Did you know that your baby's spinal cord has already started to form even before you know you're pregnant? The spinal cord begins to form within the first 28 days of pregnancy, which is more than likely before you have missed your first period, before you have had your first pregnancy visit with your OB and probably before you have taken a pregnancy test. A folic acid supplement should be started at least 3 months before you plan to become pregnant. Though many things such as bread and cereals are fortified with folic acid, the Centers for Disease Control recommends a supplement of 400 mcg per day of folic acid on top of the 200 mcg per day you get through eating a balanced diet. If you have epilepsy or diabetes or are carrying multiple fetuses, you may require more folic acid.

Folate is a B vitamin that is water-soluble and is used to make new and healthy red blood cells as well as aiding in the synthesis of DNA, gene expression, and gene regulation. This powerful B vitamin can also help prevent miscarriage, certain heart abnormalities, cleft lip, and cleft palate. Folate is found naturally in many fruits and vegetables like spinach, dried beans, asparagus, orange juice, and cantaloupe. Folic acid is the synthetic form of folate used to fortify foods such as breads, cereals, and supplements. Folic acid helps prevent Neural Tube Defects, which are malformations of the baby's brain and spinal cord. There are three main types of NTD's, spina bifida, anencephaly, and encephalocele. Spina bifida is the most common form of Neural Tube Defect. There are 3000 pregnancies affected by spina bifida or anencephaly each year. According to the US Public Health Service, 70% of NTD's could be prevented if women of child bearing age took a folic acid supplement daily of 400 mcg before and during pregnancy.

Where can you find folic acid? Green leafy veggies, citrus fruits, cereals, breads, and beans are all great sources of folic acid. Look for a multi-vitamin that contains folic acid or you can also buy just a folic acid supplement. Even though you may eat a balanced diet, your body will absorb only about 50% of the folate you consume through folate rich sources. Therefore, it is advised to consume 400 mcg of synthetic folic acid in addition to the folate found naturally in foods. About 85% of folic acid in the supplement form is absorbed by your body.

Protect you and your baby. Start a folic acid supplement and eat a balanced diet to ensure your baby the best start possible.

This and That

- Are you an avid tea drinker? Tea could interfere with the absorption of folic acid in your body so it may be a good idea to limit tea consumption before and during your pregnancy.
- Hispanic women have the highest rate of children affected with neural tube defects.

- When purchasing an over the counter multi-vitamin, be sure to look for the U.S. Pharmacopolia stamp, USP, which ensures the product has been tested for quality and safety.