

IMPORTANT INFORMATION
FOR WOMEN

FOLIC ACID

It's never too early.

www.folicacid.ca



WHAT IS FOLIC ACID?

Folic acid, also known as folate or folacin, is a B vitamin that is essential for the healthy development of a baby's spine, brain and skull during the early weeks of pregnancy. Folic acid has been proven to help reduce the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs) by more than 70% if taken *before* pregnancy.

WHAT ARE NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS (NTDs)?



Neural tube defects are birth defects that affect the brain (anencephaly) and/or spinal cord (spina bifida). NTDs occur when the tissues that form the brain

and spinal cord, fail to develop properly. These defects occur in the first four weeks after conception – usually before a woman even knows she is pregnant.

WHO IS AT RISK OF HAVING A BABY WITH NTDs?

Any woman who could become pregnant is at risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect. About one in every 1300 pregnancies in Canada is affected by a NTD. You may be at greater risk of having a baby with a NTD if:

- you have had a previous pregnancy affected by NTDs
- you (or your partner) have a personal or family history of NTDs
- you have insulin-dependent diabetes
- you use certain anti-seizure medications
- you have clinically diagnosed obesity.

HOW MUCH FOLIC ACID SHOULD I TAKE?

All women who could become pregnant should take a multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid every day. To help reduce the risk of NTDs, you should take folic acid at least three months prior to conception and throughout the first three months of pregnancy. Women at high risk of having a NTD-affected pregnancy, need to take a higher dose of folic acid and should consult with their physicians.

IMPORTANT

Even the best food choices will not supply all the folic acid you need. To reach your



required daily intake, you must take a daily multivitamin that contains a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid.

WHERE CAN I GET FOLIC ACID?

The easiest way to get the required daily amount of folic acid is to take a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid. Taking a vitamin does not reduce or replace the need for eating a healthy, well-balanced diet according to *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. You should eat food high in folic acid, such as broccoli, spinach and orange juice, as well as foods fortified with folic acid, such as white flour, enriched pasta and enriched cornmeal.