

Consumer Summary Report

Consumer Outreach Post-Campaign Evaluation 2001 and 2002

In 2002, the Folic Acid Alliance of Ontario launched a province-wide awareness campaign designed to spread the message that taking a minimum of 0.4 milligrams (mg) of folic acid each day can reduce the risk of having a child with a neural tube defect (NTD) by up to 70%. The Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) was a part of that Alliance and has since taken the lead in continuing to build awareness.

Before launching the initial campaign, the Alliance commissioned Ipsos-Reid to conduct pre- and post-campaign studies of Ontario women to gauge their knowledge of folic acid in connection with NTDs. The pre-campaign survey was conducted in September 2001, and telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 377 Ontario women between the ages of 18 and 40. The post-campaign survey was conducted in August 2002, with telephone interviews conducted with a random sample of 410 Ontario women between the ages of 18 and 45.

While the level of awareness of folic acid remained the same (at 80%) both before and after the launch, later respondents were more aware of the fact that folic acid can prevent birth defects and that women need to begin taking folic acid before pregnancy. Other key findings are as follows:

- 78% of those surveyed understood that in order for folic acid to prevent birth defects, it needs to be taken before conception (up 13%);
- 79% understood that they need to add a vitamin with folic acid to their diet (up 12%); and
- 81% indicated they were “very” or “somewhat” likely to take folic acid supplements if they were planning to have a child (up from 65%).

Understanding of folic acid was also much higher among women who said they were likely to have children in the next three years. Women who said they were somewhat or very likely to have children in the next three years were more likely than those who did not plan to have children to:

- have heard or read about folic acid in the past six months (twice as likely);
- be aware that folic acid is beneficial to pregnant women (53%);
- be aware that folic acid prevents birth defects (41%);
- feel they know enough about folic acid to decide whether or not they should take it (48%);
- be aware that a woman should start taking folic acid before conception to reduce the risk of birth defects (74%);
- be aware that in order to prevent birth defects they need to add a multivitamin to their diet before getting pregnant (79%); and
- take a folic acid supplement (72%).



Half of the respondents (49%) who had heard of folic acid heard about it through advertising (e.g., magazines, transit ads, brochures and posters, or TV and newspapers). While recall of the appearance and sponsorship of the folic acid advertisement was low, recall of the main messages was high (72% overall). Here is what the women remembered most:

- take folic acid before you get pregnant (19%);
- folic acid reduces the risk of birth defects (14%); and
- take a daily vitamin containing folic acid (5%).

Despite the significant impact the folic acid campaign made regarding public knowledge of folic acid, especially among women planning to have children in the following three years, there remained some areas that required further education and still need to be followed up on now, in 2011:

- most women were still not aware of the daily dosage of folic acid recommended to reduce the risk of birth defects;
- the age of the mother at birth was mistakenly believed to be the most common risk factor for spina bifida;
- most women of childbearing age were unable to accurately identify foods sources of folate (i.e., folic acid); and
- only 35% of women interviewed were currently taking a multivitamin.

Without an ongoing public awareness effort, complacency is a very real possibility. With misinformation out there countering the message that at least 0.4 mg of folic acid each day can safely reduce the risk of having a baby born with a NTD, SB&H continues to need the assistance of health professionals and other community members to tell every woman of childbearing age they know to take a multivitamin containing folic acid.

For more information, visit www.folicacid.ca.