



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.

WHICH FOODS CONTAIN FOLIC ACID?

BEST SOURCES

.055 mg or more per serving

Asparagus, boiled or canned	(1/2 cup)
Broccoli, raw, boiled or steamed	(1/2 cup)
Brussel Sprouts	(1/2 cup)
Corn, canned, cream style or niblets	(1/2 cup)
Romaine Lettuce	(1 cup)
Spinach, raw or boiled	(1/2 cup)
Orange Juice, frozen, diluted	(1/2 cup)
Sunflower Seeds, dry roasted	(1/2 cup)
Liver, beef or chicken	(50 g/2 oz)
Beans, black, Roman, kidney, pinto navy, white, boiled or canned	(1/2 cup)
Peanut Butter, natural	(2 tbsp)
Peanuts, dry roasted	(1/4 cup)
Lentils, boiled	(1/2 cup)

GOOD SOURCES

.033 mg -.054 mg per serving

Bean Sprouts, stir-fried	(1/2 cup)
Iceburg or Boston Lettuce	(1 cup)
Green Peas, frozen, boiled or steamed	(1/2 cup)
Tomato Juice, canned	(1 cup)
Cantaloupe	(1/2 fruit)
Orange Juice, freshly squeezed	(1/2 cup)
Bran Cereal	(1/2 cup)
Hummus	(1/4 cup)
Eggs	(2)
Pumpkin Pie Filling, canned	(1/2 cup)

CAN NTDs BE DETECTED BEFORE BIRTH?

Some NTDs can be detected before birth. Talk to your health care provider if you wish to know more about the prenatal blood test (maternal serum screening, triple test) or ultrasound test that can give you more information about whether your developing baby has a neural tube defect.

WHO SHOULD TAKE FOLIC ACID?

All women who could become pregnant should take a daily multivitamin containing folic acid. Since many pregnancies in Canada are unplanned, and neural tube defects occur before most women even know they are pregnant, all women who could become pregnant should take folic acid.



**TAKE FOLIC ACID TODAY –
BEFORE GETTING PREGNANT.**

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FOR WOMEN**

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