



FOLIC ACID HEALTH ACTION SHEET

WHAT IS FOLIC ACID?

Folic acid is a B vitamin that every cell in your body needs for normal growth and development. Taking folic acid before and during early pregnancy can help prevent serious birth defects of the brain and spine called neural tube defects (NTDs). The neural tube is the part of a developing baby that becomes the brain and spinal cord. Some studies also show that folic acid may help prevent birth defects in a baby's mouth called cleft lip and palate.

WHY DO YOU NEED FOLIC ACID BEFORE PREGNANCY?

Taking folic acid before and during pregnancy can help lower your risk of having a baby who has an NTD by 70 percent.

Plan to take folic acid before pregnancy, even if you're not trying to get pregnant. Here's why:

- NTDs happen in the first month of pregnancy, before you may know that you're pregnant.
- Nearly half of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned.

HOW MUCH FOLIC ACID DO YOU NEED EACH DAY?

Your body needs 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid when you aren't pregnant. During pregnancy, this amount increases to 600 mcg every day.

The food that you eat has folic acid in a different form, called folate. It's hard to get all the folic acid you need only from food because your body doesn't absorb folate as well as it absorbs folic acid.

Even if you eat healthy foods every day, the best way to get all the folic acid you need is by taking a vitamin supplement with folic acid in it.

Go to marchofdimes.org/FolicAcid for more information and resources.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Before pregnancy, take a vitamin supplement with 400 mcg of folic acid each day, even if you're not trying to get pregnant.
- During pregnancy, take a prenatal vitamin each day that has 600 mcg of folic acid in it.
- Eat healthy foods that contain folic acid.

TAKE ACTION

Even if you are not planning a pregnancy right now, your body needs folic acid.

Take a vitamin supplement with folic acid in it.

Are you taking any of these?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A multivitamin | <input type="checkbox"/> A supplement that contains just folic acid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A prenatal vitamin | |

Eat foods that contain folic acid.

Which one of these are you eating regularly?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fortified breakfast cereals | <input type="checkbox"/> Asparagus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enriched bread, rice or pasta | <input type="checkbox"/> Romaine lettuce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spinach | <input type="checkbox"/> Broccoli |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beans | <input type="checkbox"/> Peanuts or peanut butter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lentils | <input type="checkbox"/> Oranges or orange juice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peas | <input type="checkbox"/> Bananas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avocados | <input type="checkbox"/> Products made with fortified corn masa flour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs | |