

All Women and Men Need Folic Acid Every Day

The risk of neural tube defects -- birth defects of the brain (anencephaly) and spinal cord (spina bifida) -- is significantly reduced when women get enough of the vitamin, folic acid before they become pregnant. Folic acid may also help prevent certain types of cancer.

- The brain and spinal cord are formed during the first month of pregnancy before most women know they are pregnant. That's why **it's important for women to get adequate folic acid throughout their childbearing years**, even when not planning a pregnancy. Then, if a woman gets pregnant, her risk of having a baby with a serious defect of the brain or spinal cord is reduced.
- **Women need to continue taking folic acid during pregnancy** in their pre-natal vitamins.
- **Men and post-menopausal women also need folic acid every day** to reduce their risk of heart disease, stroke, and cervical or colon cancer.

How To Get Enough Folic Acid

Women who could possibly become pregnant need 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. The same amount (400 mcg) is also recommended for men and post-menopausal women. Pregnant women need 600 mcg. Taking a multivitamin or eating foods fortified with folic acid, in addition to eating foods that contain the vitamin naturally, helps you get enough.

- **Check with your health care provider or a registered dietitian about the need to take a daily multivitamin** if you're not getting at least 400 mcg each day from the foods you eat.
- **Cereals and other grain products (such as bread, pasta, and rice) fortified with folic acid are the best food sources of folic acid.** You can get 400 mcg of folic acid every day by eating a cereal for breakfast that contains 100% of the "daily value" for folic acid. Read the label on the cereal box to find out how much folic acid it contains.
- **Eating foods high in folate (the natural form of the vitamin) on a regular basis will also help you get folic acid.** Some foods high in folate include:
 - ▶ Kidney beans
 - ▶ Black beans
 - ▶ Lentils
 - ▶ Split peas
 - ▶ Orange juice
 - ▶ Asparagus
 - ▶ Broccoli
 - ▶ Spinach
 - ▶ Other dark green leafy vegetables