



## Folic Acid

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Folic acid, also known as folate, is a B-vitamin that is especially important for women who are pregnant or could become pregnant. If women have enough of it in their bodies before pregnancy, this vitamin can decrease the risk for neural tube defects (NTDs), which are birth defects of the baby's brain (anencephaly) or spine (spina bifida).

Up to 70% of some types of serious birth defects can be prevented if women take recommended amounts of folic acid *before* and *during* pregnancy. Taking folic acid before a woman becomes pregnant is important because by the time most women know they are pregnant, the baby's brain and spine have already formed. That is why all women of child-bearing age should ensure they are getting enough folic acid every day (see below).

The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that all women who could possibly become pregnant get 400 micrograms (or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day. It is recommended that women who are pregnant take 600 micrograms (or 0.6 mg), or the amount of folic acid in a prenatal vitamin (typically 800 to 1,000 micrograms). Women should not take more than 1,000 micrograms of supplemental folic acid unless instructed to do so by their doctor.

For many women, an easy way to be sure they are getting enough folic acid is to take a vitamin with folic acid in it. Folic acid has been added to some foods, such as enriched breads, pastas, rice, and cereals. A few cereals have 100% of the folic acid you need in a day. In addition, folic acid is found naturally in green leafy vegetables, oranges, and dried beans and peas, although our body does not absorb this form of folic acid as readily as the form in vitamins and enriched foods.