

January 4-10 is Folic Acid Awareness Week

You never know what the New Year will bring. So, whether or not you're planning to have a baby this year, (about 50 percent of all pregnancies are unplanned) you can start the new year with habits that will help give a baby a healthy start in life.

January 4-10 is Folic Acid Awareness Week and a great time to start taking a multivitamin with 400 mcg of the B- vitamin folic acid every day. Starting before pregnancy begins is an important way to reduce the risk of birth defects of the brain or spine called neural tube defects (NTD) by up to 70 percent. NTDs occur in the first weeks of fetal development, often before a woman even knows she is pregnant.

Not only do Latinas have higher rates of NTD-affected pregnancies, they also have the lowest awareness/knowledge about folic acid than women of other race/ethnic groups, and lower consumption of folic acid than white non-Hispanic women.

What is folic acid and why do you need it?

Think you are getting all of the vitamins you need from your diet alone? Think again. Most people don't know that it is hard to get certain vitamins from food alone. Many believe they don't need to take multivitamins because they eat healthy foods. Multivitamins help fill in those nutrition gaps in the diet, especially when it comes to getting enough folic acid.

Folic acid is an essential B vitamin; therefore, everyone needs it in order to stay in good health. Folic acid helps build DNA and your body uses it for cell growth and reproduction, fundamental building block processing and genetic material production. Folic acid is water soluble, therefore it passes through your body very quickly. Taking folic acid every day ensures that you always have it in your system.

Other than being needed to create and regenerate cells in your body, it also has protective effects. Studies show that folic acid reduces the risk of certain cancers; cardiovascular diseases including coronary heart disease and stroke; and cognitive diseases or mental conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, age-related dementia or cognitive decline and depression.

For women in their childbearing years, it is particularly important to consume 400 mcg of folic acid daily. It has been shown to reduce the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs) in developing babies by up to 70 percent. Since 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned, it's important to take folic acid every day even if you're not planning to get pregnant. Neural tube defects are birth defects of the brain and spine. The most common are Spina Bifida and anencephaly. **INSERT REGIONAL OR NATIONAL STATISTIC AS APPROPRIATE.**

The **ORGANIZATION** works to educate consumers and health care providers about the benefits and uses of folic acid. **INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION.**

INCLUDE QUOTE FROM CONTACT PERSON/SPOKESPERSON FROM ORGANIZATION.

Folic acid is the synthetic form of the naturally occurring folate. Folate is found in foods such as leafy green vegetables, beans, liver and some fruit. The synthetic version, folic acid, is found in multivitamins and fortified foods like breakfast cereal, pasta and bread. Scientists don't know exactly why, but folic acid is easier for your body to absorb than folate. Plus folate loses its potency easily and is hard to get in large amounts.

In 1998, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration started fortifying grain and cereal products with folic acid in order to reduce neural tube defects. While this was a great step in the fight to prevent birth defects, it is not enough to protect all women and their potential children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Public Health Service recommend that all women of childbearing age take 400 mcg of folic acid every day. The best and most reliable way to get that amount is to take a multivitamin, B vitamin complex pill or folic acid pill.

The **ORGANIZATION** recommends taking a multivitamin so that you can be sure to get consistent amounts of other vitamins and minerals like A, C, B6, E, Iron and Calcium. Eating a healthy diet and exercising are recommended in addition to taking a multivitamin every day.

People who are interested in joining the effort should contact **NAME** at **PHONE** or by e-mail at **EMAIL**. For more information about the **ORGANIZATION** or folic acid visit **WEB SITE** or call **PHONE NUMBER**.