



spotlight on health

Folic Acid For The Health Of Your Family

(NAPS)—There's encouraging news for women who are planning to have children: Taking the B-vitamin folic acid every day can help reduce the risk of having a child with spina bifida or other neural tube defects (NTDs).

Spina bifida involves incomplete formation of the spine and is the most common NTD, a group of serious birth defects of the brain and spinal cord. It may lead to paralysis of the legs, loss of bowel and bladder control, water on the brain and learning disabilities. One out of every 1,000 newborns in the United States has spina bifida; fortunately, many go on to lead successful and productive lives.

NTDs like spina bifida occur during the first month of pregnancy—before most women know they are pregnant. In addition, such birth defects can happen in any family. Most babies with spina bifida are born to parents with no family history of the condition.

Folic acid helps build healthy cells, so it is important for all women who could become pregnant to take it every day. While folic acid cannot guarantee having a healthy baby, it can help. Studies have shown that if women of childbearing age were to take folic acid every day, their chances of having a child with an NTD may be reduced by 75 percent.

Folic acid has also been shown to have other benefits for both men and women, such as fighting heart disease and certain cancers. Folic acid is available in many multivitamins and by eating such foods as dark green, leafy vegetables; oranges; and fortified breads and cereals.



By taking folic acid every day, women can help reduce the risk of spina bifida.

For most women, it is enough to take 400 micrograms of folic acid. Other women who have a history of NTDs need to take ten times as much, for one to three months before pregnancy and for the first few months of pregnancy. This amount (4000 mcg) is available by prescription. It is important for women to speak with a doctor and plan their pregnancies to be sure they are getting the right amount of folic acid.

For women not thinking about becoming pregnant, it is still important to take a vitamin supplement with folic acid every day, as half of all pregnancies are not planned. If you are a woman thinking about becoming pregnant, speak with your doctor about your personal risk of having an NTD-affected pregnancy.

For more information, call the Spina Bifida Association of America at 1-800-621-3141, e-mail sbaa@sbaa.org or visit the Web site at www.sbaa.org.