

# Health Awareness



## Understanding Spina Bifida

(NAPSA)—Spina bifida is a common birth defect of the spine that causes life-long disabilities. This birth defect happens very early in pregnancy before women even know they are pregnant. Over 70,000 Americans have spina bifida. Many more have a very mild form of spina bifida, called spina bifida occulta.



Not all people with spina bifida have the same disabilities. A person with spina bifida may need a wheelchair or braces in order to walk, have loss of bowel and bladder control, learning disabilities or may be allergic to products with rubber. Many people with spina bifida lead successful and productive lives.

Recent scientific studies show that all women of childbearing age should take a vitamin with folic acid every day—even when not planning a pregnancy. This reduces the risk of spina bifida up to 70 percent because folic acid is a B-vitamin that helps build healthy cells. In addition to folic acid, genetics and maternal environmental factors are involved in spina bifida.

To learn more, call the Spina Bifida Association of America at 1-800-621-3141 or visit [www.sbaa.org](http://www.sbaa.org).