Thinking of having a baby?

FOLIC ACID – WHAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD KNOW
YOU CAN HELP PROTECT YOUR BABY AGAINST SPINA BIFIDA IF YOU ACT BEFORE YOU GET PREGNANT

Fortunately, there is something you can do to give your child the best possible chance of not having a neural tube defect.

Research shows that if you take a folic acid supplement every day, you are less likely to have a baby with spina bifida. This is because folic acid helps the baby's spine develop properly. Medical studies have shown that women who take a daily folic acid supplement before pregnancy and during the first trimester are less likely to have a baby with spina bifida.

The simplest way to make sure you get enough folic acid is to take a folic acid supplement every day. They are easy to find in pharmacies, health food shops and most supermarkets and cost around £1. For one month's supply, you will need to take 0.4 mg of folic acid daily.

To protect your baby against neural tube defects like spina bifida, you need to take a folic acid supplement every day. This is important because folic acid can be found in many foods you may eat every day, and it is very difficult to get enough to protect your baby from spina bifida through your normal daily diet alone.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FOLIC ACID

What is folic acid?

It is a water-soluble B vitamin. It is available as a supplement and is also used to fortify foods, such as breads and breakfast cereals (you can tell which ones by looking at the labels). Folic acid is also found naturally in a variety of foods, such as Brussels sprouts, green beans, oranges and yeast and beef extracts.

How do you get enough folic acid?

To protect your baby against neural tube defects like spina bifida, you need more folic acid than you can get from your daily diet – in fact, it is estimated that you need three times the amount you could normally expect to eat in one day.

Because of this, doctors and other health professionals recommend that you take a daily folic acid supplement every day. This is the best way to ensure that you are taking the right amount of folic acid to benefit the healthy development of your baby.

- You should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily, as well as at least five portions of breads and breakfast cereals.
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When is the right time to start taking extra folic acid?

The best time to start taking extra folic acid is before you get pregnant. It is recommended that you take a daily folic acid supplement before pregnancy and during the first trimester. This is because folic acid helps the baby's spine develop properly. Medical studies have shown that women who take a daily folic acid supplement before pregnancy and during the first trimester are less likely to have a baby with spina bifida.

It is important to start taking extra folic acid before you get pregnant, as it helps to protect your baby from developing a neural tube defect.

Can folic acid be harmful?

All the research shows that folic acid has no side-effects in women of childbearing age, even if they have already had children. Folic acid is not recommended for use in women of childbearing age who are pregnant or who are breastfeeding.

Sign up for a free consultation to learn more about how you can help protect your baby from spina bifida.
What if I’m already pregnant?

If you find out you are pregnant, you should start taking folic acid supplements straight away and continue doing so until the end of your twelfth week of pregnancy. There is no need to continue taking a supplement beyond this time.

Please do not worry if you are more than twelve weeks pregnant and have not taken folic acid – remember that most babies are born in perfect health.

Where can you get supplements?

You can buy folic acid supplements from pharmacies, health food stores and most supermarkets. It is also possible to get folic acid supplements on prescription. However, it is usually cheaper to buy them unless you qualify for free prescriptions.

Folic acid supplements are small, easy to take, and you only need one tablet a day of the right strength (400 mcg).

There are different brands of folic acid supplements, so you have a choice. Make sure you get one that contains the right amount, that is 400 mcg, and remember that supplements which contain folic acid only are the best.

We don’t know how to prevent all birth defects but we do know how to reduce the risk of neural tube defects like spina bifida. Following the advice in this leaflet, you can reduce the risk to your baby.