

# women need *folic acid*

Increase your chances of having a healthy baby.



Every woman who could become pregnant should take a daily multivitamin supplement which contains 0.4 mg of folic acid.

## What is folic acid?

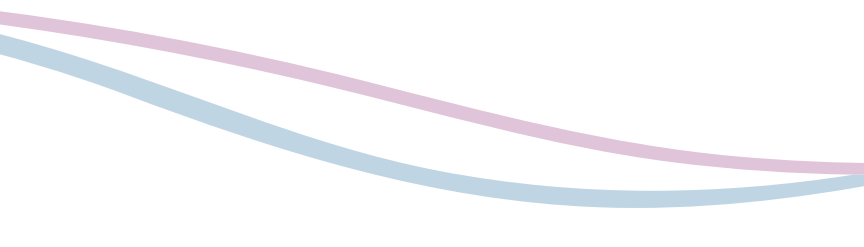
Folic acid is a B vitamin. During pregnancy, folic acid helps the baby's spine, brain and skull develop properly.

**Folic acid can help prevent neural tube defects in babies before they are born.**

## What is a Neural Tube Defect?

A neural tube defect (NTD) is a serious birth defect that can cause stillbirth or lifelong physical problems. An NTD happens when a baby's brain and spinal cord do not develop normally in the first weeks of pregnancy. This can happen before a woman knows she's pregnant. That's why it's so important to take folic acid before you become pregnant.

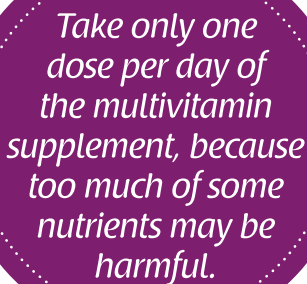
There are several different types of NTDs. Spina bifida is the most common NTD. People with spina bifida have some paralysis of their legs, ranging from mild to severe, and problems with bowel and bladder control.



## Women need to take folic acid before they become pregnant.

Health Canada recommends that all women who could become pregnant should take a daily multivitamin supplement containing 0.4 mg of folic acid, in addition to eating good food sources of folic acid. Folic acid may be listed on food labels as “folate”.

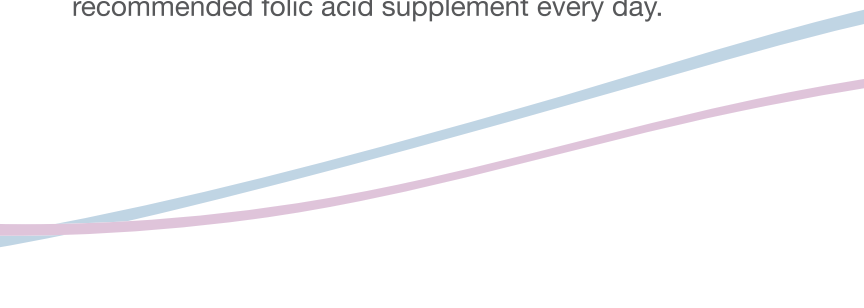
At the very least, start taking your supplement 3 months before you plan on becoming pregnant. Make sure your supplement also contains vitamin B12 because women who are low in vitamin B12 are at higher risk of having a baby with an NTD.



*Take only one dose per day of the multivitamin supplement, because too much of some nutrients may be harmful.*

## Do I need to take folic acid if I'm not planning to become pregnant?

Yes. Birth control can fail, and many pregnancies are unplanned. If you are a sexually active woman who could possibly become pregnant, you need to take the recommended folic acid supplement every day.



Women at higher risk of having a baby with an NTD may need more than 0.4 mg of folic acid daily.

Talk to your doctor if any of the following applies to you:

- previous pregnancy affected by an NTD
- family history of NTD
- diabetes
- obesity
- epilepsy
- medications that interfere with folate metabolism
- alcohol abuse
- malabsorption and gastric bypass surgery
- liver disease
- kidney dialysis
- impaired glucose metabolism
- hyperinsulinemia

If you are at higher risk of having a baby with an NTD, your doctor may prescribe a higher dose of folic acid.

*Do not take more than 1 mg of folic acid per day unless recommended by your doctor.*



## Can I get enough folic acid from food to help prevent NTDs?

No. Normally, women can meet their own body's needs for folic acid by eating a variety of foods as outlined in Canada's Food Guide. However, it is hard for women to get enough folic acid from foods to help prevent NTDs. That is why Health Canada recommends a daily multivitamin containing 0.4 mg of folic acid for all women who could become pregnant, in addition to eating good food sources of folic acid.

Folic acid is found in foods such as vegetables (especially dark green), grain products (whole grain or enriched), some fruits, dried peas, beans and lentils, peanuts, and other nuts and seeds.



## When you are pregnant.

Follow *Canada's Food Guide* to help you stay healthy and grow a healthy baby. During pregnancy and breastfeeding, you need more calories. Include an extra 2 to 3 Food Guide servings each day.

Here are two examples:

- have fruit and yogurt for a snack, or
- have an extra slice of toast at breakfast and an extra glass of milk at supper.



When you are pregnant, you should take a multivitamin/mineral supplement which includes folic acid, vitamin B12 and iron. Talk to your doctor about all supplements. Your doctor may recommend you switch from the multivitamin you were taking before pregnancy to a prenatal supplement.

*Go Healthy*



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