

Folic Acid

Supplementation before conception reduces the risk of Spina Bifida.

Although the exact causes of Spina Bifida are not yet known, maintaining healthy levels of folate (called folic acid when taken via a supplement) have been identified as a key factor in prevention.

What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a B vitamin that helps a woman's body produce healthy red blood cells. Taking folic acid before and during the first three months of pregnancy does not guarantee the baby will not have SB, but it can significantly reduce the risk. Research has shown that if women who could become pregnant were to take a multivitamin with folic acid, the risk of neural tube defects like Spina Bifida could be reduced by up to 70%.

Where can I get folic acid?

Folate occurs naturally in foods like green vegetables, fruits and juices. Some cereal and bread have folic acid added to them. A diet high in folate is good for you, but most people do not get enough through food alone. The best way to get the right amount is to eat a healthy diet, and take a vitamin with folic acid every day.

How much folic acid do I need?

Women who could become pregnant should take 400 mcg (0.4 mg) of folic acid through a vitamin.

Women who have Spina Bifida, a child with SB, or had a pregnancy affected by SB should take 4000 mcg (4.0 mg) of folic acid for one to three months before pregnancy. This amount of folic acid is available only through prescription, so high risk women must carefully plan their pregnancies. Taking folic acid before and during the first three months of pregnancy does not guarantee the baby will not have SB, but it can significantly reduce the risk.

