

Healthy Babies: The Importance of Folic Acid

Hispanic babies are at higher risk of brain and spine birth defects



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Each year in United States approximately 3,000 infants are born with serious defects of the spine and brain called neural tube defects (NTDs). Hispanic women have a 30-40 percent higher risk of having babies with these birth defects. NTDs occur in the first few weeks of pregnancy, very often before a woman even knows she is pregnant. Folic acid has been found to prevent up to 70 percent of NTDs. Yet, only 21 percent of Hispanic women are consuming enough folic acid compared with over 40 percent of white women.

Folic acid is a B vitamin that it is used in our bodies to make new cells. A woman's body uses folic acid to make healthy new cells for her baby. If a woman has enough folic acid in her body before she is pregnant, it can help prevent these major birth defects of her baby's brain (anencephaly) and spine (spina bifida). Every woman who could possibly get pregnant should take 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid daily in a vitamin or in foods that have been enriched with folic acid.

“It is crucial for every woman, but especially for Hispanics, to take folic acid every day even before getting pregnant, so that we can

continue to decrease the number of children born with neural tube defects,” said Alina Flores, Health Education Specialist at the CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

The easiest way to get enough folic acid is by taking a supplement with folic acid. “Many Hispanic women believe that vitamins with folic acid are just for pregnant women, that they make you gain weight, that they are very costly or that you need a prescription. None of these myths is true,” says Flores.

It might be hard to remember one more thing to do, but research shows that by pairing taking folic acid supplement with another daily activity, like tooth brushing, can help women remember. Also, some women say that they keep supplements in strategic locations, such as in a purse, so it is easy to take anywhere. Hispanic mothers, grandmothers, sisters, cousins and friends, should remind those considering motherhood to make folic acid intake part of their daily routine.

Take folic acid today!

For more information about folic acid, neural tube defects, or fortified foods, please call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/spanish/default.htm>.

Ways to add folic acid to your daily diet

- A supplement with folic acid, such as a multivitamin
- Fruits, such as grapes and oranges
- Enriched breads, rice and pasta
- Breakfast cereals
- Vegetables, such as spinach and broccoli
- Most beans, especially soy beans
- Liver