

Hispanic Babies are at Higher Risk of Brain and Spine Birth Defects: Mothers Who Take Folic Acid can Reduce that Risk



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Each year in United States approximately 3,000 pregnancies are affected by 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% of NTDs. Yet, only 21% of Hispanic women report consuming enough folic acid as compared to 41% of white women.

Folic acid is a B vitamin that is used in our bodies to make new cells. 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 who can become pregnant to take folic acid every day, so that we can continue to decrease the number of pregnancies affected by neural tube defects. This is especially important for Hispanic women since they have higher rates of affected pregnancies.” said Alina Flores, Health Education Specialist at the CDC's

National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Even with careful diet planning, it is still difficult to get all the folic acid you need. Women can get the 400mcg of folic acid they need by taking a vitamin supplement that contains folic acid, eating fortified foods such as breakfast cereals, rice, pasta, and bread, or doing both of these. In addition, it is recommended to eat healthy foods rich in food folate, such as dark green leafy vegetables.

Folic acid pills and most multivitamins sold in the United States have 100% of the daily value (DV) of folic acid; check the label to be sure. You can find these supplements in any pharmacy and you do not need a prescription. It might be hard to remember one more thing to do, but research shows that pairing taking a folic acid supplement with another daily activity, like brushing your teeth, can help women remember. Also, some women say that they keep supplements in places where they can easily remember to take them, such as in a purse. Hispanic mothers, grandmothers, sisters, cousins and friends, should remind those considering motherhood to make folic acid intake part of their daily routine.

Take one today!

For more information about folic acid, neural tube defects, or fortified foods, please call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/basics.htm.

Ways to add folic acid to your daily diet:

- A supplement with folic acid such as a multivitamin.
- Enriched breads, rice and pasta
- Dark, green leafy vegetables