Pregnancy - Common Symptoms and Care Tips
Article

Benefits of Folic Acid - Why It's Important for Pregnancy

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What is folic acid and why is it important for pregnant women?

Folic Acid, your Pregnancy Mate

- Consumption of a healthy balanced diet pre-pregnancy, during pregnancy and during lactation period is **crucial to guarantee your health and your newborn's health.** Adequate intake of vitamins and minerals will help in preventing birth defects, diseases and in developing a healthy baby. In fact, **one of the most crucial vitamins during pregnancy is Folic Acid.**

What is folic acid and why is it important for pregnant women?

- Folic acid is an essential vitamin for our body since **it helps in making healthy red blood cells.** It is the version of the vitamin B9(folate) made in our bodies.[1] **Everyone needs folic acid but it is a crucial pre-pregnancy and pregnancy vitamin that needs to be taken by all women of childbearing age.**[2] It will help in planning for a healthy pregnancy because it helps in preventing major brain and spine birth defects in babies known as neural tube defects (NTDs).



When should I I start taking folic acid?

- The risk of having birth defects of the brain and spine can happen in the first weeks of pregnancy. **To prevent these defects, it is better to be prepared in advance and start taking folic acid before you start planning on getting pregnant.** In fact, unintended pregnancies can happen and starting to take folic acid today has no harm but in contrary it will help in building stores in your body because **by the time you realize you are pregnant it might be too late to prevent these birth defects.**[3]

How much folic acid do I need to take and how do I get it?

- The recommended **daily amount** for woman of childbearing age is 400mcg/day.[2] And **there are 3 different ways in which you can get your folic acid needs:**



1) The easiest way is **taking a vitamin with 400mcg of folic acid.** If pills bother your stomach, try taking them with **meals or just before sleeping.**



2) Eating **a diet rich in folic acid.** Folic acid is found in:[3]

- Beans, peas, and lentils
- Oranges and orange juice
- Asparagus and broccoli
- Dark leafy green vegetables such as spinach and mustard greens



3) Eating foods fortified with folic acid such as **breads, pastas, rice, cereals and cereal bars, corn chips and tortillas.** Check the nutrition label on food packaging to see if the product contains folic acid and how much it contains per serving. A serving of **30g** from some cereals may contain between **20-30%** of your daily folic acid needs.[3]



- It might be difficult to reach the recommended daily intakes only from food sources therefore **vitamin supplements will be recommended.** Make sure to have the right amount of folic acid either from **food sources or vitamin supplements or both,** keep in mind that there is no need in exceeding the recommended daily needs. **Always consult with your doctor for any concern or sign and symptom you feel.**

REFERENCES

1- Folic acid: vitamin that helps the body make healthy red blood cells - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
2- Women Need 400 mcg of Folic Acid Every Day | CDC
3- Folic Acid Helps Prevent Some Birth Defects | CDC

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