MARCH OF DIMES

Folic acid

What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a B vitamin that helps your body make new cells and supports your baby's healthy growth. Taking it before and during early pregnancy can support proper fetal development, protect your baby's brain and spine, and may reduce the risk of birth differences* like cleft lip or cleft palate. These early stages of life are sacred and deserve care — folic acid is one way to nourish the life growing inside you.

Why do you need folic acid before pregnancy?

Folic acid can lower the chance of neural tube differences* by **up to 70%**. These differences form in the first few weeks, often before you know you're pregnant. Since many pregnancies aren't planned, it's important to take folic acid even if you're not trying to get pregnant.

How much folic acid do you need each day?

Your body needs **400 micrograms** of folic acid each day. Folate is the natural form found in foods, but it's harder for the body to absorb. Even with good foods, most people still need a vitamin with folic acid to meet our needs.

What can you do?

- Even if you're not planning for pregnancy, take a daily vitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid to care for you and your baby.
- Once pregnant, continue taking a prenatal vitamin with at least 400 micrograms each day to support your baby's growth.
- Our bodies need nourishment from the land; eating food that contains folic acid supports your health.

Take action

Many Indigenous foods like beans, leafy greens, corn, and wild plants are rich in folate, the natural form of folic acid. Our ancestors knew how to care for life from the land. Today, combining traditional foods with vitamins when needed helps us walk in balance, honoring both old and new ways of care.

Which of these foods could you add more of to your diet?

- ☐ Enriched bread
- ☐ Rice or pasta
- ☐ Spinach
- ☐ Beans
- ☐ Lentils
- ☐ Peas
- ☐ Avocado
- ☐ Eggs
- ☐ Asparagus
- ☐ Romaine lettuce
- ☐ Broccoli
- ☐ Nuts/seeds
- ☐ Strawberries
- ☐ Raspberries
- ☐ Papaya
- ☐ Sweet potatoes
- ☐ Wheat germ
- ☐ Beef, chicken, or fish

* While often described as "defects," many families and communities recognize congenital conditions as natural differences in how a child is formed. Using language like "born different" or "born with a unique condition" honors the dignity of each child without centering medicalized or deficit-based views.

For more information **Visit marchofdimes.org/folicacid**

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