

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

WHAT WOMEN NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FOLIC ACID

Take a multivitamin with folic acid if there is any chance that you could become pregnant. You and your future baby need the important health benefits of folic acid during the early stages of pregnancy. Folic acid is a B vitamin needed for healthy growth. Although there are two forms of the B vitamin (folic acid and folate), this fact sheet will refer to both as folic acid.

Since many pregnancies are unplanned, all women who could become pregnant should take a multivitamin with 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid every day.

WHY IS FOLIC ACID IMPORTANT?

During the first four weeks of pregnancy, folic acid plays a key role in the growth of a baby's spine, brain and skull. It is during this time that many women do not yet know they are pregnant.

Getting enough folic acid before becoming pregnant lowers the risk of birth defects called Neural Tube Defects (NTDs). Spina bifida and anencephaly are both NTDs that can lead to stillbirth or lifelong disability.

GETTING ENOUGH FOLIC ACID

Take a multivitamin daily

The time to make sure that you are getting enough folic acid is before you get pregnant.

PUBLIC HEALTH

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york.ca/nutrition

Most women do not get enough folic acid from food alone, so in addition to a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide, take a multivitamin supplement with 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid every day. Talk to your health care provider to find out if you need more than 0.4 mg of folic acid daily

Follow these tips:

- Choose one with 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid
- Any form of folic acid is acceptable
- Do not take more than one per day unless prescribed by your health care provider
- Read label warnings since some may have cautionary notes for pregnancy
- To save money, buy the generic or "store-brand" version
- Take them for at least three months before getting pregnant
- Once pregnant, switch to a prenatal multivitamin that also has 16-20 mg of iron

Include food sources of folic acid

Many foods contain folate, the form of the B vitamin found in food. Include the following foods in your diet, along with your multivitamin, to help you get enough folic acid.

Vegetables

- Leafy greens like collards, endive, escarole, turnip greens, romaine or mesclun lettuce and spinach

- Green vegetables like cooked artichokes, asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and okra
- Certain other vegetables like beets, parsnips and potatoes, with skin

Fruit

- Avocado
- Mango
- Orange and orange juice
- Papaya

Grain products

- Bagels, bread and naan
- Pasta and egg noodles, enriched
- Rice, enriched

Milk and alternatives

- Not a good source of folic acid

Meat and alternatives

- Beans and lentils
- Eggs
- Liver
- Soy, bean or lentil-based meat substitutes
- Peanuts or natural peanut butter
- Peas (chickpeas, black-eyed)
- Soybeans, green (edamame)
- Soy nuts
- Sunflower, seeds or butter

Other foods

- Yeast extract spread (vegemite or marmite)

MEAL AND SNACKS IDEAS

Breakfast

- Cereal topped with sunflower seeds and berries
- Egg burrito made with scrambled egg, refried beans, cheese and salsa wrapped in a tortilla
- French toast and orange juice
- Sunflower seed butter on whole grain toast with orange slices
- Spinach and feta cheese omelet with fruit
- Whole grain bagel with natural peanut butter and sliced banana

Lunch and dinner

- Lentil or black bean soup with whole grain crackers and a side salad
- Baked potato, with skin, topped with vegetarian chili using ground meat substitute
- Bean salad with diced vegetables and cheese
- Pasta in sauce with chicken, artichokes, spinach and sun-dried tomatoes
- Egg and avocado salad on whole wheat bread
- Chickpea, lentil or tofu curry with naan
- Baked salmon with roasted potatoes, Brussels sprouts and parsnips
- Spinach salad topped with sunflower seeds and chick peas or egg slices
- Broccoli and beef stir-fry served over rice
- Frittata made with potatoes and broccoli

Snacks

- Trail mix made with peanuts, soy nuts, sunflower seeds and dried fruit
- Smoothie made from blended frozen papaya or mango, orange juice and yogurt
- Whole grain toast with yeast extract spread
- Steamed edamame

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

york.ca/prenatal - York Region Public Health information on preconception and prenatal health, including prenatal classes

york.ca/nutrition - York Region Public Health information on healthy eating

beststart.org - Best Start Resource Centre

healthycanadians.gc.ca/pregnancy - Health Canada

unlockfood.ca – Dietitians of Canada

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

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