

FINAL (6/15/2007)

**Questions & Sample Answers / ECHO-TV Show # 400 - 401
“Folic Acid”**

(Recording Show: Tuesday, June 26th, 2007 / 3:00-8:00 pm @ TPT)

1. This show is about folic acid as part of prenatal preventive health care. Why is folate or folic acid important to our community?

Sample Answer:

- Consuming enough folate or folic acid every day, starting before and during pregnancy, can reduce the risk for birth defects of the brain and spine by 50% to 70%.
- Specific to each community:
 - Hispanic women are at higher risk of giving birth to children with birth defects. It's unclear why this group is more at risk than most.
 - SE Asian residents are used to eating foods with folic acid but to be sure women of childbearing age get enough, they should include a multi-vitamin or folic acid pill in their diet.
 - Somali women may wish to choose multi-vitamins or folic acid pills not made with gelatin because gelatin can sometimes be made with pork.
 - It's important to check your family history and talk to relatives about children in the family born with birth defects
- Many things can increase a woman's chance of having a baby with a Neural Tube Defect or NTD, which affect the baby's brain or spine including:
 - Giving birth to a child with an NTD or having a family history of an NTD-affected birth.
 - Being diabetic with uncontrolled high blood sugar
 - Taking some medicines (like some of those that treat epilepsy)
 - Being exposed to high temperatures in early pregnancy (such as fever that lasts a while, or using hot tubs and saunas)
 - Being obese (which also adds to diabetes risk)

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2. What is the difference between folate and folic acid?

Sample Answer:

- Folate is a natural B vitamin and folic acid is the man-made form of folate
- Folate is found in the following foods:
 - Citrus fruits including oranges and grapefruits
 - Whole grains, dried beans and peas
 - Green leafy vegetables (foliage) like broccoli and asparagus
- Because we often don't eat enough folate to satisfy dietary needs, folic acid is added to foods like bread, cereal, multi-vitamins and other dietary supplements.
- Folic acid was added to the US grain supply in 1999 to help increase folic acid levels. The number of birth defects of the brain and spine in the US has decreased since then.

3. What kinds of birth defects might be reduced if women take folic acid before they get pregnant?

Sample Answer:

- NTD's happen within the first few weeks of pregnancy when the neural tube (which later turns into the brain or spine) doesn't develop well.
- The two most common NTD's are Spina Bifida (SPY-na-BIF-a-DUH) and Anencephaly (Ann-En-SEF-uh-lee)
- Spina Bifida occurs when the spine and back bones do not close as they should leaving an opening in the baby's back.
- Anencephaly occurs when the brain and the skull do not form causing part or all of the brain and skull bones to be missing.

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4. How are children affected by Spina Bifida?

Sample Answer:

- Most children born with spina bifida live full lives but they often have lifelong disabilities and need many surgeries.
- People with Spina Bifida:
 - May not be able to move lower parts of their body so children must use crutches, braces or wheelchairs to get around
 - May have loss of bowel or bladder control
 - May have fluid build up on the brain requiring surgery
 - May have learning disabilities

5. How much folic acid do women need?

Sample Answer:

- Most women in the US do not get enough folic acid to help prevent birth defects
- All women who can become pregnant should get 400 micrograms of folic acid in their diet each day
- In recent years the folic acid levels in U.S. women has decreased—possibly due to low-carb diets or the popularity of unfortified whole-grain breads
- Women who are more at risk of giving birth to children with birth defects may need to take more than 400 micrograms each day and should see a doctor for the proper prescription

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6. Can a woman take too much folic acid?

Sample Answer:

- A doctor, nurse, or WIC dietician can give you more information on how much folic acid is best for your body
- A typical multivitamin contains 400 micrograms of folic acid which is what most people need every day
- Never take more than one multi-vitamin per day. Taking the right amount of vitamins and minerals is important.

7. Why can't I wait until I'm pregnant, or planning to get pregnant, to start taking folic acid?

Sample Answer:

- Birth defects of the brain and spine happen in the first few weeks of pregnancy; often before a woman finds out she is pregnant.
- You need to begin taking folic acid prior to pregnancy to ensure you have the right amount of folic acid in your body.
- All women of childbearing age need folic acid daily because it has been shown that about half of all pregnancies are unplanned

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8. How can women make sure they get enough folic acid?

Sample Answer:

- People don't consistently consume enough foods with folate so we need to take a folic acid supplement
- There are several ways to consume folic acid every day:
 - Take one vitamin with folic acid each day: Most multi-vitamins sold in the US have the amount of folic acid for women each day (400 mcg)
 - Eat a bowl of a breakfast cereal that has 100% of the daily value of folic acid per serving every day. The label on the side of the box should say "100%" next to folic acid.
 - Take a folic acid pill every day. These are sold in most grocery stores, pharmacies or discount stores.
- Help yourself remember to take a multi-vitamin or folic acid pill every day by making it part of your routine such as in the morning after you brush your teeth or before you go to bed.

9. Is there anything else our expert guest might like to add?

Sample Answer: (Optional question only if time permits)

- Even if you are not planning on becoming pregnant, start a routine of taking a multi-vitamin every day to help you stay healthy
- Folic acid may help to prevent some other birth defects, such as cleft lip and palate and some heart defects in babies
- Folic acid may also help protect you from heart disease and some cancers, including cervical, colon, and possibly, breast cancer
- People who use alcohol frequently don't absorb vitamins as well