

Folic Acid / Multivitamin for Women of Reproductive Years

The Center for Disease Control, CDC, and the United States Public Health Service recommend that all women of childbearing age should consume 0.4mg of folic acid daily, to decrease the first occurrence of a neural tube defect (NTD). This amount of folic acid is usually found in most over-the-counter multivitamins.

The neural tube is the embryo's precursor to the central nervous system. Improper closure of the neural tube can result in neural tube defects. Folic acid aids in the proper closure of the neural tube.

It is recommended that folic acid be started one month prior to conception and continued during early pregnancy.

Beginning folic acid supplementation after six weeks of pregnancy is not likely to be of value in preventing a neural tube defect because the neural tube closes approximately four weeks after conception.

Neural tube defects, NTD's, are among the most common birth defects that result in infant mortality and serious disability. These defects include anencephaly, spinabifida, and encephalocele. Occurrence is approximately 1-2/1000 births in the United States. Ninety-five percent of children with neural tube defects are born to couples who do not have a family history of such defects. The causes of most neural tube defects are unknown.

Patients with a family history of a neural tube defect need to be on higher doses of folic acid prior to attempting pregnancy. Please let us know if you or your husband have a family history of a neural tube defect so that we may counsel you appropriately.