

What foods are good sources of folic acid?

Although you need more folic acid than you can get from your diet alone to prevent neural tube defects, it is important that you eat a healthy well-balanced diet. The following are excellent and good sources of folic acid:

Excellent Sources

artichokes
asparagus
beans (*black, navy, white, pinto, kidney*)
chickpeas
lentils
liver
Edamame/baby
soybeans (*cooked*)
spinach

Good Sources

avocados
beans (*baked, lima*)
bean sprouts
beets
broccoli
brussel sprouts
eggs
endive
enriched pasta
mussels
parsnips
peas (*split, green*)
peanuts
potatoes with skin (*cooked*)
romaine lettuce
sunflower seeds



For more information: Talk to your family physician, nurse practitioner, specialist, pharmacist, public health nurse or dietitian about taking folic acid before you become pregnant.



**PEI Reproductive
Care Program**



**SPINA BIFIDA AND
HYDROCEPHALUS
ASSOCIATION OF PEI**

Health PEI

One Island Health System

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Folic Acid

What every woman should know



*...if you are planning
a pregnancy or if you
could become pregnant*

If you are thinking of becoming pregnant or if you could become pregnant, you need to take a multivitamin with folic acid every day.

Why do I need to take extra folic acid?

Folic acid is a B vitamin also known as folate or Vitamin B9. It reduces your risk of having a baby born with a neural tube defect. A neural tube defect is a type of malformation of the brain or spinal cord. The two most common neural tube defects are spina bifida and anencephaly. Spina bifida happens when the spine does not develop normally. Anencephaly happens when the skull and brain do not develop normally.

You can reduce your risk of having a baby born with a neural tube defect if you take enough folic acid before and while you are pregnant. Spina bifida and other neural tube defects occur during the third or fourth week of pregnancy. At this time, you may not even know that you are pregnant.

What if I am not planning a pregnancy?

Almost half of all pregnancies on Prince Edward Island are unplanned. If you are sexually active you need the extra folic acid provided by a multivitamin supplement.

How can I make sure that I get enough folic acid?

Although folic acid is found in certain foods, **you need more folic acid than you can get from your diet alone** to prevent neural tube defects.

You should take a multivitamin supplement containing 0.4 to 1.0 mg of folic acid every day if you are thinking of becoming pregnant or if you could become pregnant.

You should start taking a multivitamin supplement at least three months before becoming pregnant, throughout pregnancy, four to six weeks after pregnancy, and as long as breastfeeding continues.

By taking a multivitamin supplement containing 0.4 to 1.0 mg of folic acid every day, you lower your risk of having a baby born with a neural tube defect.

Is it OK to take more than one multivitamin supplement each day?

Do NOT take more than one multivitamin supplement each day. You may get too much of other vitamins which could harm you or your baby.

Your multivitamin should also include Vitamin B12 and 16-20 mg of elemental iron and should have Vitamin A as beta-carotene rather than retinol.

Some women need 5 mg of folic acid

Some women need more folic acid before and during pregnancy. **Talk with your doctor** about the amount of folic acid that you need if:

- you or your partner have a neural tube defect;
- you or your partner have a child or a close relative with a neural tube defect;
- you belong to a high risk ethnic group (*Celtic, Sikh, Northern Chinese*);
- you have celiac disease, diabetes, epilepsy and are taking anticonvulsants;
- you are obese (BMI > 30);
- you are taking medication that may block folic acid (*Methotrexate, Chloramphenicol*);
- you skip meals or don't eat foods rich in folic acid; or
- you smoke, drink alcohol or use recreational drugs.

