



## **I AM PLANNING A PREGNANCY. DO I NEED TO TAKE VITAMINS?**

Congratulations on your decision to have a baby. By planning ahead and making needed changes now, you are more likely to be prepared for a healthy pregnancy. Some aspects of pregnancy cannot be controlled, but there are some things you can do. Good care and a healthy lifestyle prior to and during pregnancy increase the odds that you will have a successful pregnancy and healthy baby.

Taking a folic acid supplement before you become pregnant will help you and your baby start out with a necessary nutrient. Folic acid is a type of vitamin that is important to the development of your baby, especially during the first months of pregnancy. Not having enough folic acid in your diet before you are pregnant and early in pregnancy increases the risk of having a type of birth defect known as a neural tube defect. These defects affect the baby's spine and skull. Folic acid is also used to make the extra blood your body needs during pregnancy.

Women should have 0.4 milligrams a day of folic acid before and during pregnancy. It should be taken for 1 month before pregnancy and during the first 3 months of pregnancy. Because it is difficult to get all the folic acid you need from your diet, we recommend you choose to take a supplement of this vitamin. The best sources of folic acid in foods include:

- Dark, leafy greens and vegetables (such as spinach, collard and turnip greens)
- Whole-grain breads and cereals
- Citrus fruits and juices
- Organ meats (such as liver)
- Dried peas and beans

The chance of having a child with a spine or skull defect is greater in women who have had a child with this problem. We recommend these women consume a higher dosage of folic acid. These women need 4 milligrams of folic acid daily, taken for 1 month prior to pregnancy and during the first 3 months of pregnancy. They should take the folic acid alone, not as a part of a multivitamin preparation.

If you are planning to become pregnant, visit your doctor. Getting good care before you are pregnant will help you have a healthy pregnancy.