



Preconceptional Consumption of Folic Acid

AWHONN supports legislation and policies that encourage women of childbearing age to consume 400 micrograms of synthetic folic acid every day. AWHONN nurses have the responsibility to inform their patients of the benefits of folic acid consumption during routine visits.

- All health contacts involving the provision of contraception to women offer the opportunity for a reminder of the protective effects of a folate-rich diet combined with synthetic folic acid, information about how this can be achieved, and the reminder that it needs to start two months before conception.
- Additionally, all women who have a fetus diagnosed as having a NTD in pregnancy, or give birth to an infant with a NTD, need to be given information about the risk of recurrence in a subsequent pregnancy and to be advised of the protective effect of the preconception folate supplementation. The Public Health Service recommends taking 4000 micrograms of folic acid starting at least one month before conception and continuing throughout the first three months of pregnancy for women who have already had an NTD-affected pregnancy.

Background: Neural tube defects (NTDs) are among the most serious, common and preventable birth defects, which occur in the United States. Each year an estimated 2,500 babies are born with these defects, and many additional affected pregnancies result in miscarriage or stillbirth. Up to 70 percent of NTDs can be prevented by consuming 400 micrograms of folic acid every day, beginning before pregnancy, from good sources including a daily multivitamin supplement.

This recommendation is supported by the Institute of Medicine, which advised that all women of childbearing age take 400 micrograms of synthetic folic acid daily, from supplements and/or fortified foods, to reduce NTD risk. Other supporting sources of folic acid include enriched grain products, fortified breakfast cereals, and a balanced diet containing foods that are naturally high in folates, such as orange juice, leafy green vegetables, and beans.

Approved by the AWHONN Board, June 1999. Reaffirmed June 2007.