

[IMAGE]

## Nutritional Influences on Pregnancy

Unless this is your first time reading a nutrition article, you're probably well aware of the importance of adequate folic acid intake before and during pregnancy. Previous studies have demonstrated that folate deficiency can contribute to serious birth defects such as spina bifida or anencephaly. Babies with spina bifida are born with a defect in the spinal column that can lead to paralysis and/or mental retardation; those afflicted with anencephaly never develop a brain and are stillborn or die shortly after birth.

Evidence also suggests that folic acid deficiency may contribute to spontaneous abortion, and other reports have shown that elevated plasma homocysteine (an amino acid produced when the body breaks down meat and dairy products) may exert a similar influence. A study in *Obstetrics & Gynecology* examined these potential associations further in 123 women with an average of three pregnancy losses.

Significantly lower average serum folate concentrations, and elevated homocysteine concentrations, were noted in the study group compared with a control group (104 premenopausal, unrelated women who were similar to the study group in age, geographical location and social class). The increased risk for recurrent early pregnancy loss seen in the study group was the same when adjusting for either variable, suggesting that folate (low levels) and homocysteine (high levels) are independent risk factors for early pregnancy loss.

These findings add to the considerable evidence linking folic acid deficiency with negative birth outcomes. Consult with your team of health care professionals during pregnancy to ensure the health of you and your child.

### *Reference:*

Nelen WLD, Blom HJ, Steegers EAP, et al. Homocysteine and folate levels as risk factors for recurrent early pregnancy loss. *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 2000; Vol. 95, pp519-24.

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