

[IMAGE]

Preemptive Strike

Did you know you can actually protect your baby before she's even born? By taking folic acid supplements before and during pregnancy, you can prevent birth defects, based on a recent study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

Birth defects in an infant's developing central nervous system are called "neural tube defects" (NTDs). These defects result when the spine and brain, or the bones that protect the two, don't form correctly during pregnancy. In 1994, Canada recommended that prior to and during pregnancy, all women should include folic acid supplementation in their diets because it has been shown to help prevent NTDs. The authors of this study tracked the success of Canada's recommendation by looking at all births in Nova Scotia from 1991-2000, and comparing the incidence of NTDs:

- before the 1994 recommendations;
- after the recommendations; and
- after November 1998, when Canada began fortifying grain products with folic acid because of little response from mothers to follow recommendations.

The study revealed that following government recommendations to take folic acid supplements, the incidence of NTDs remained the same as before. However, following government fortification of grain products, the risk for these defects dropped by over 50%.

Folic acid is vital for a healthy baby. Women who could become pregnant should take folic acid daily, in addition to a healthy diet, for at least two months prior to a planned pregnancy until at least the end of the first trimester of pregnancy. Everybody should include folic acid in their diet for its many health benefits; simply taking a multivitamin provides enough for most people.

Reference:

Persad VL, Van den Hof MC, Dubé JM, et al. Incidence of open neural tube defects in Nova Scotia after folic acid fortification. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2002;167(3), pp. 241-245.

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