

A Healthier Tomorrow Starts Today

Folic Acid and Birth Defects

We want our children to reach their fullest, healthiest potential. Together we can promote healthy pregnancies and lower the risk of birth defects. A healthier tomorrow starts today!

What Are Birth Defects?

- Birth defects are health conditions present when a baby is born.
- They can cause problems with a baby's health, how their body develops, or how their body works.
- They can impact a baby's brain, heart, head, spine, limbs, organs, bones, and cognitive development.

Certain actions taken before and during pregnancy can reduce the risk of birth defects.



Tips to Reduce the Risk of Birth Defects:

1. Eat a healthy diet and get enough folic acid
2. Connect with prenatal care early and throughout your pregnancy
3. Stay up to date on vaccinations
4. Avoid tobacco, alcohol, and other substance use
5. Get tested for sexually transmitted infections
6. Get help if your basic needs – safety, housing, and food – are not being met

What is Folic Acid?

Dietary Folate is the natural form of **vitamin B9**. Folic Acid is the human-made form of vitamin B9.

Folic acid is a **B vitamin** that our bodies use to make new cells, skin, hair, nails, blood, and more.

It is hard to get enough folate from diet alone. A healthy diet and vitamin with folic are recommended.

Dietary Folate can be found in:
- Foods like dark, leafy green vegetables
- Some citrus fruits
- Beans

Folic Acid can be found in:
- Fortified cereals, breads, and other foods
- Multivitamins

Why is it Important?

Everyone can benefit from folic acid.

In addition to reducing the risk of some birth defects, folic acid may decrease the risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer in adults.

Do multivitamins upset your stomach?

Take them with food or just before bed!

Daily Folic Acid Recommendations:

- **People of reproductive age**: Take a prenatal vitamin or other multivitamin with 400mcg folic acid
- **Pregnant people**: Take a prenatal vitamin with at least 400mcg folic acid
- **Previous pregnancy with a neural tube defect:** Take a prenatal vitamin with at least 400mcg folic acid, even when not planning to become pregnant

*People with the MTHFR gene variant can still process both folate and folic acid.

Before Pregnancy

Getting enough folic acid early in pregnancy can help prevent birth defects in a baby's brain and spine, even before people might know they are pregnant.

If you are planning to become pregnant, **now is the time to focus on your folic acid intake.**

If there is a chance you may become pregnant, but are not ready to have a baby, it's important to use reliable birth control that works for you. If you need help finding or paying for birth control - contact Well Badger.
There are options available!

During Pregnancy

Eat a healthy diet rich in folate and take a multivitamin with folic acid.



Folic acid early in pregnancy can help prevent birth defects of the **brain and spine**. Most birth defects occur in the first **28 days,** generally before most people know they are pregnant.

Not Getting Enough Folic Acid Increases The Risk Of:

Neural tube defects

Early in pregnancy, a baby's neural tube forms the brain and spine. If the neural tube doesn't close completely it can lead to serious disabilities like **spina bifida** (spine defect) and **anencephaly** (brain defect). These defects occur in the first 28 days of pregnancy.

Congenital heart defects

Baby's heart develops throughout pregnancy. Sometimes, there are problems with how it forms such as a small hole, malformed parts, or missing parts.

Cleft lip or palate

These conditions happen when parts of the mouth, upper lip and/or gum do not fuse (come together) completely.

After Pregnancy

Continue to take a multivitamin with **400mcg folic acid** for at least three months postpartum.



Steps You Can Take Today:

1. **Enroll in FoodShare if you are eligible.**
   FoodShare can help people with limited money buy the food they need for good health.
2. **If you are pregnant, see if you are eligible for WIC**
   WIC can provide:
   - nutrition education
   - breastfeeding education and support
   - more nutritious food

   They can also make referrals to other health and nutrition services.
3. **Get vitamins with folic acid for free or at a reduced cost**

BadgerCare Plus (Medicaid) Members:
Any person of reproductive age 12-60 can get a free prescription for prenatal vitamins, which contain folic acid.

How to get vitamins with folic acid:
- Schedule an appointment with your healthcare provider (if you don't have one, contact Well Badger)
- Tell your provider "I would like a prescription for a multivitamin or prenatal vitamin with folic acid"
- Pick up the prescription at your local pharmacy
- Try to take the vitamin every day



If you are not a Medicaid member, check with your healthcare provider or insurance carrier.

WELL BADGER RESOURCE CENTER

Need help getting free vitamins with folic acid, FoodShare, WIC or other help?

Contact the Well Badger Team today!
We are here to listen and help

Call
1(800) 642-7837

Text
(608) 360-9328

Email
help@wellbadger.org

Or visit wellbadger.org to chat live or search our online directory of free and low-cost services!

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Learn more about other ways to prevent birth defects at healthier-tomorrow.org