



Folic Acid



Folic Acid Recommendations

All women of reproductive age should get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid each day, in addition to consuming food with folate from a varied diet, to help prevent neural tube defects (NTDs). NTDs are major [birth defects](#) of the baby's brain ([anencephaly](#)) and spine ([spina bifida](#)).

Recommendations



The CDC, Institute of Medicine, and U.S. Preventive Services Task Force all recommend that women of reproductive age take folic acid to help prevent NTDs.

- [Read more about CDC's folic acid recommendations](#)
- [Read more about the Institute of Medicine's folic acid recommendations](#) 
- [Read more about the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's folic acid recommendations](#)  : An update for this topic is in progress.

Recurrence prevention

Women who have already had an NTD-affected pregnancy and are planning to become pregnant again should consult with their healthcare provider. The current recommendations are that these women consume 4,000 mcg of folic acid each day beginning 1 month before becoming pregnant and through the first 3 months of pregnancy.

When not planning to become pregnant, women who have had an NTD-affected pregnancy should consume 400 mcg of folic acid each day.

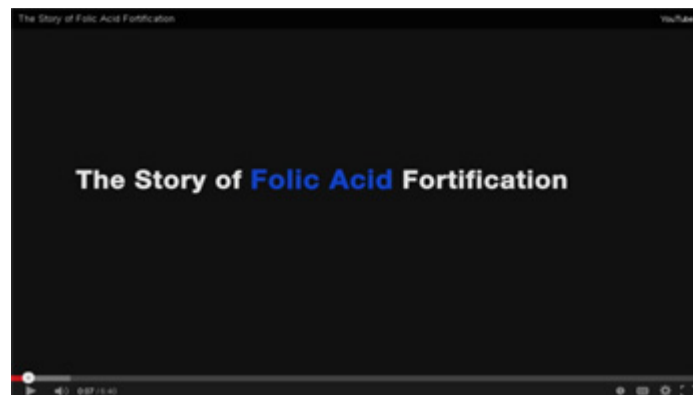
- The recommendation to take a higher dose of folic acid is based on data from the most rigorous scientific study involving women who had previous NTD-affected pregnancies. Dosages lower than 4,000 mcg have not been studied in women who have had a previous NTD-affected pregnancy.

[Read more about this recommendation](#)

History of folic acid recommendations in the United States

Research Timeline

Video: Folic Acid Fortification



This documentary short chronicles the hard work behind folic acid fortification in the United States and its positive effects on the health and well-being of so many children and families.

[Watch the video »](#)

Researchers have studied the association between low folate levels in women and neural tube defects as early as 1965.¹ [Neural tube defects](#) are major birth defects of a baby's brain ([anencephaly](#)) and spine ([spina bifida](#)). A number of studies showed that taking folic acid before and during the first weeks of pregnancy helped to lower the chance of neural tube defects.¹

1991

CDC recommended that women who had a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect consume folic acid before planning to become pregnant again.²

1992

The U.S. Public Health Service recommended that all women who could become pregnant get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid each day to prevent neural tube defects.³

1998

The Institute of Medicine's Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences recommended that all women who can become pregnant get 400 mcg of folic acid each day, in addition to consuming food with folate from a varied diet, to reduce the risk of neural tube defects.⁴

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required that manufacturers add folic acid to cereal grain products labeled as 'enriched' to lower the chance of neural tube defects from occurring. This is [mandatory fortification](#).⁵

- Mandatory fortification is the most effective public health strategy to help prevent neural tube defects because
 - Almost half of all pregnancies are unplanned;⁶
 - Folic acid is only effective before and during the first weeks of pregnancy, often before a woman knows she is pregnant; and
 - It is not necessary to remember to take a vitamin each day before becoming pregnant.

Hispanic Heritage



Celebrate heritage and prioritize your family's health with folic acid!

2016

Hispanic/Latina women are more likely to have a child born with a neural tube defect compared to non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black women and lower median total folic acid (FA) intake.⁵⁻⁷ To address this health disparity and help more women get the recommended daily value of folic acid each day, the FDA allowed folic acid to be added voluntarily to corn masa flour. This is [voluntary fortification](#). Adding folic acid to corn masa flour will

- Increase the average amount of daily folic acid women get;
- Help more women, specifically Hispanics/Latinas, get the recommended daily value of folic acid;⁸ and
- Prevent an estimated 40 (range of 0-120) additional Hispanic infants per year from being born with an NTD.⁹

Data from 2017-2018 have shown that voluntary fortification with folic acid has not yet had an impact on the folate status among Hispanic women of reproductive age in the [United States](#) [🔗](#).¹⁰ It is important to check the nutrition label on food packaging to see if it contains folic acid, as corn masa flours may or may not contain folic acid.

More information

[Learn more about folic acid here](#)

For more information, visit the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.

You can also contact CDC-INFO in English or Spanish:

- 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
- TTY: 1-888-232-6348

- [In English](#)
- [En español](#)

References

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