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Folic acid use when you are planning a pregnancy

This leaflet is intended for any woman of child-bearing age who is pregnant or might get pregnant, or is planning a pregnancy in the near future.

Our aim with this leaflet is to increase awareness about Folic Acid use.

What is Folic Acid?

Folic acid is a Vitamin which helps to reduce the risk of your baby having Spina Bifida. Taking Folic Acid may also reduce the risk of heart or limb defects and some childhood brain tumours. **The recommended daily dose is 400 micrograms (µg).**

When should you start taking Folic Acid?

Ideally, you should start taking daily extra folic acid before you conceive (3 months before getting pregnant) and continue to take it daily until you reach your 13th week of pregnancy. If you did not take folic acid before you became pregnant, start taking it as soon as you realise you are expecting a baby.

You can get **400 micrograms (µg) Folic acid tablets** at pharmacies and most supermarkets stock it as well.

Some women will need to take a higher dose of folic acid. Why?

If your risk of having a baby with spina bifida is higher than normal, you will be advised to take a daily dose of 5 milligrams (mg) of folic acid. This is higher than usual and it will need to be prescribed by a doctor.

You may be advised to take an increased dose if:

- you have had a previous pregnancy affected by spina bifida
- you or your partner have spina bifida
- you are taking certain medications for epilepsy
- you have coeliac disease
- you have diabetes
- your BMI is 30 or more
- you have sickle-cell anaemia or thalassaemia; the higher dose of folic acid will also help to prevent and treat anaemia if you are in this situation.

Please speak to us as soon as you can if you are in the above groups so we can prescribe the higher dose for you.

Important resources:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/trying-for-a-baby/planning-your-pregnancy/>
- <https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/planning-pregnancy/planning-for-pregnancy-tool>
- <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pregnancy/pi-healthy-eating-and-vitamin-supplements-in-pregnancy.pdf>