

# Health Unit Media Release



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## Women Recommended to Supplement with Folic Acid

Females can reduce their risk of having babies with neural tube defects by taking folic acid **before** getting pregnant. Folic acid is not only for women trying to become or already pregnant. **Health Canada recommends that all sexually active females take a multivitamin containing 0.4mg of folic acid every day during their childbearing years.**

Folic acid is a B- vitamin that is crucial for the healthy development of a baby's spine, brain and skull. **Research shows that a diet rich in folate and supplemented with 0.4mg of folic acid can help reduce the number of babies born with neural tube defects (NTDs) by as much as 70%.**

NTDs are birth defects that occur within the first few weeks of pregnancy. Since over half of all pregnancies are not planned, many women do not even know they are pregnant until after this time. Therefore, all females who have **any** chance of getting pregnant should take a multivitamin with 0.4mg of folic acid every day.

"Act now to prevent serious birth defects in your unborn babies," says Krystal Taylor, Registered Dietitian. She also states, "**Taking a multivitamin does not replace the need to eat healthy. Choose foods rich in folate and foods fortified with folic acid as well as taking a multivitamin to reduce your risk of having a baby with an NTD.**"

According to the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System 2004/2005, about 67% of women surveyed in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark reported taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid before pregnancy. **Start folic acid supplementation at least 2 to 3 months prior to conception and continue throughout the first trimester to be effective.** Talk to your healthcare provider about folic acid today; it's never too early.

For free resources and more information about folic acid, contact the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit's Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 (or 613-345-5685) and ask to speak with a Public Health Nurse or Registered Dietitian.

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