

# Health Unit Media Release



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## Over 1/3 of women do not take enough folic acid in Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark

According to the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System 2004/2005, 33% of women in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark do not take a folic acid supplement before pregnancy. 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 folic acid every day.

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada both recommend that all women who can become pregnant take a daily multivitamin containing 0.4mg of folic acid at least 2-3 months prior to pregnancy, throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada further recommend that **women with certain health or lifestyle risks might need to take a folic acid supplement up to 5 mg per day.**

**"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 folic acid supplement to reduce your risk of having a baby with an NTD"** says Carole Chang, Registered Dietitian with the Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark District Health Unit. She also states **"Take a folic acid supplement even if you are taking birth control"**, highlighting the fact that approximately 50% of pregnancies are unplanned.

Talk to your healthcare provider about folic acid today and find out how much folic acid you need, 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 a Registered Dietitian. Check out other information on health before pregnancy at [www.healthunit.org/pregnancy](http://www.healthunit.org/pregnancy).

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