January 2-8 2011 National Folic Acid Awareness Week

The week of January 2 – 8, 2011 is set aside as Folic Acid Awareness Week to increase short term and long term maternal and fetal outcomes.

Folic acid is a “B” vitamin your body needs every day to be healthy. It can reduce your risk of heart disease, colon cancer and stroke. Folic acid is especially important for women of childbearing age to improve birth outcomes and decrease the risk of neural tube defects of the brain and spine in the baby. Folic acid prevents birth defects when taken several months before becoming pregnant.

About 3,000 pregnancies are affected by neural tube defects each year in the United States at a cost of $400 million annually. If all women took adequate folic acid before getting pregnant and during early pregnancy, up to 70% of neural tube defects could be prevented.

Some of the benefits of adequate folic acid intake are:

- Promotes normal fetal growth and development
- Reduces risk of birth defects
- Decrease miscarriage, spontaneous abortion and fetal death
- Decreases folic acid deficiency and folic acid deficiency anemia
- Decreases homosysteine which might prevent some cardiac disease and colorectal cancer
- During lactation, breast milk is the folate source for the breastfed infant

All women capable of becoming pregnant should consume 400 microgram (0.4milligrams) of folic acid daily. A pregnant woman needs to increase folic acid intake to at least 600 micrograms unless otherwise directed by a health provider. Folic acid is also found in the following foods: fortified breakfast cereals, lentils, asparagus, spinach, black beans, peanuts, orange juice, enriched breads and pasta, romaine lettuce and broccoli.

For more information about folic acid, please see the following websites:

- [www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/healthyliving/nutrition/Pages/FolicAcidResources.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/healthyliving/nutrition/Pages/FolicAcidResources.aspx)
- [www.folicacidinfo.org](http://www.folicacidinfo.org)
- [http://www.marchofdimes.com/pregnancy/folicacid_before.html](http://www.marchofdimes.com/pregnancy/folicacid_before.html)

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