



5.3.8 Common Congenital Anomalies – Neural Tube Defects – Primary Prevention Policies



Image credit: Shutterstock

Research shows that women can reduce their risks of having a baby with a neural tube defect by taking folic acid, or folate, which is a B vitamin. Folic acid is essential for the development of the baby's brain and spine. Studies have shown that women who take enough folic acid supplements and eat a healthy diet before they become pregnant and during the early part of their pregnancy are less likely to have a baby with a neural tube defect.¹

In 1998, the Canadian government required that white flour, enriched pasta, and cornmeal be fortified with folic acid.² The Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada recommended that all women who could become pregnant take a supplement containing 0.4mg of folic acid and suggested a higher dose for women who are at increased risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect.³

¹ Lumley J, Watson L, Watson M, Bower C. Periconceptional supplementation with folate and/or multivitamins for preventing neural tube defects. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2001;3.

² Millar W. Folic Acid Supplementation. *Statistics Canada, Health Reports (Catalogue 82-003-XIE0).* Ottawa: Statistics Canada; 2004;15(3):49–52.

³ Van Allen MI, McCourt C, Lee NS. Preconception health: folic acid for the primary prevention of neural tube defects. A resource document for health professionals, 2002. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada; 2002. Catalogue No.: H39-607/2002E

