

*pregnancy,
folic acid,
and you.*

*Reducing the risk
of spina bifida.*





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***What is
spina bifida?***

Spina bifida is a disability affecting the spine. It occurs very early in pregnancy and can result in a baby being totally or partially paralysed. In the UK around 400 babies a year are born severely disabled by spina bifida (and other similar conditions) – but you can help to reduce the risk if you follow the advice in this leaflet.

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***What can I do to reduce
the risk to my baby?***

- Make sure you eat more of a B vitamin called folic acid from your diet.

AND

- If you think you may become pregnant take a folic acid tablet every day.

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***Eat foods to help
beat spina bifida***

A baby's spine is most at risk from spina bifida during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy.

This is why it is important to eat more foods rich in folic acid **before** you are planning a pregnancy. The foods which contain folates or folic acid are those recommended to everyone as part of a well balanced diet.

They are vegetables such as potatoes, spinach, spring greens and other green leafy vegetables, fresh or frozen Brussels sprouts, green beans or peas and cauliflower or okra, and fruit such as bananas, grapefruit or oranges. Savoury yeast

or beef extracts, bread and cereals, pitta bread, nan, and chapattis also contain folic acid. Some breads and many breakfast cereals have folic acid specially added to them. You can tell by looking at the label.

Most beans and pulses such as lentils, red kidney beans and soya beans (and their products) contain good amounts, as do baked beans.

There is also folic acid in milk and other dairy products such as yoghurt, and in rice and pasta.

Look at the page opposite for some examples showing the amount of folic acid in different foods.

Amounts of folic acid in portions of selected foods

Try to eat five or more of these foods every day. If they have to be cooked don't overcook them, as cooking eventually destroys the folic acid and other vitamins in food.

	<i>Folic acid per serving (micrograms)</i>
VEGETABLES	
Broccoli (90g)	60
Brussels sprouts (90g)	100
Cauliflower (90g)	45
Green beans (frozen) (90g)	50
Kale (90g)	40
Peas (frozen) (90g)	40
Potatoes (old) (180g)	45
Potatoes (new) (180g)	35
Spinach (or other dark green leafy vegetable) (90g)	80
BREAD AND CEREALS	
Two slices of wholemeal bread	30
Two slices of white bread	20
Two slices of bread (fortified)	70
Two chapattis	20
One bowl of breakfast cereal (fortified)	100
FRUIT	
One banana	15
One orange or a glass of orange	60
Half a grapefruit	20
BEANS AND PULSES	
Black-eye beans (60g)	130
Chickpeas (60g)	30
Baked beans (canned reheated) (135g)	30
DAIRY PRODUCTS	
One pint of milk	35
One pot of yoghurt	24
OTHER FOODS	
One cup yeast/meat extract (from one level teaspoon)	95
Yeast/meat extract on one slice of bread	40

Folic acid supplements are also needed

To make sure you are getting enough folic acid when you are planning a pregnancy, you should take folic acid tablets as a supplement to your diet. You should continue taking them until the twelfth week of pregnancy.

If your pregnancy is unplanned, start taking a daily folic acid supplement as soon as you realise you are pregnant. Continue taking the tablet until the twelfth week. Make sure you eat foods containing folic acid.

Where can I get the supplements?

You can get them from your local chemist or a health food store. Ask for 400 microgram (400mcg) folic acid tablets (this may also be written as 0.4mg). If these are not available, ask for a supplement of B group vitamins which includes about the same amount of folic acid. Multi-vitamin and mineral supplements also contain some folic acid but are likely to contain less than you need. Do not be tempted to take more of these to give you the right amount of folic acid, as you may take too much of some of the other vitamins and minerals.

**IMPORTANT
INFORMATION
FOR WOMEN
AFFECTED BY
SPINA BIFIDA**

The advice in this leaflet is for women who have never had spina bifida in their family. If you have already had a baby affected by spina bifida, or have it yourself, you should talk to your doctor BEFORE you try and get pregnant.

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**A word of warning:
DON'T EAT LIVER
WHEN YOU ARE
PREGNANT**

Some people may tell you that liver is good for you – it is, but NOT when you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Although it has high amounts of several vitamins such as folic acid, it may contain such large amounts of vitamin A that your baby could be harmed.

So DON'T eat liver or products made with it such as paté or liver sausage when you are pregnant.

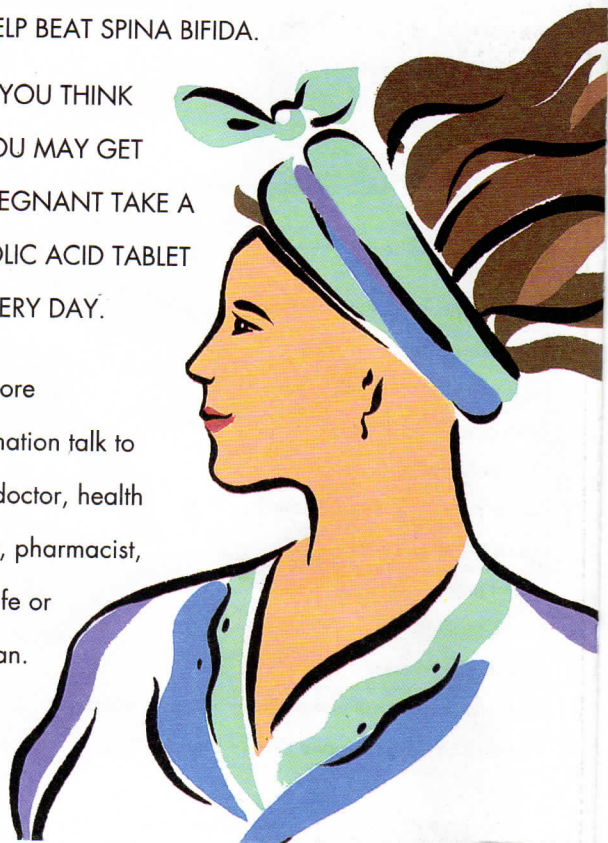
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Finally...

It's true that we still don't know how to prevent some birth defects. But now you DO know how you can help prevent your baby from having spina bifida. If you follow the advice in this leaflet, you too can help reduce the risk to your baby.

SO

- EAT FOODS TO GIVE YOU PLENTY OF FOLIC ACID TO HELP BEAT SPINA BIFIDA.
- IF YOU THINK YOU MAY GET PREGNANT TAKE A FOLIC ACID TABLET EVERY DAY.

For more information talk to your doctor, health visitor, pharmacist, midwife or dietitian.



For further information about spina bifida contact the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (ASBAH) at ASBAH House, 42 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2UQ. Telephone 0733 555988.

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