

Why right now?

Because the baby's spine develops very early in pregnancy, even before you may realise you are pregnant, it is important to start taking folic acid before you become pregnant – ideally at at least two months beforehand.

Continue taking folic acid until you attend the maternity hospital and then follow the instructions of your Consultant and Doctor.

If you could become pregnant, start taking folic acid today.

What if I am already pregnant?

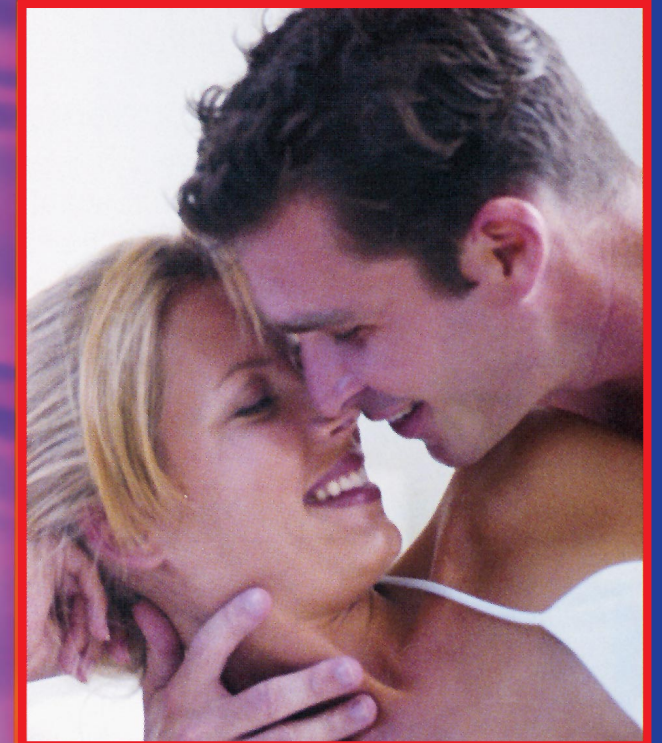
If you find out you are pregnant, start taking a folic acid tablet (400 micrograms) today and continue until you go for your first check-up to the maternity hospital.

Remember that NTDs are quite rare and most babies are born perfectly healthy, so don't worry too much if you didn't take folic acid in early pregnancy.

Where can I get more information about folic acid and spina bifida or other neural tube defects?

Talk to your family doctor, your community dietician/nutritionist, your public health nurse, your chemist, or your local health board.

Folic Acid



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One of life's essentials

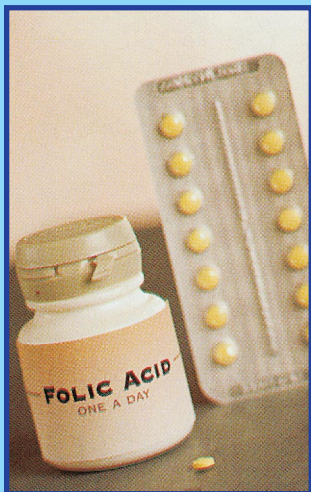
One of life's essentials

A lot of women know when they would like to have a baby. However, even if you are not planning a baby right now, it is important to be aware of the benefits of folic acid. Taking folic acid before you become pregnant can help protect your unborn baby from conditions such as spina bifida.

Folic Acid – why it's important

About seven babies born in Ireland every month have spina bifida or other neural tube defects (NTDs). Up to half of these babies die around birth and most of the survivors are severely disabled for life. Folic acid can help reduce the risk of having a baby with spina bifida.

What is folic Acid?



Folic acid is a natural B vitamin. It cannot be made by the body, so it needs to be taken in as food or in a tablet.

However, doctors believe that, although folic acid is found in many foods, it is very difficult to get enough to help protect your baby from spina bifida from food alone.

Who should take extra folic acid?

If there is any possibility that you will become pregnant, than you should be taking folic acid. If there is a history of NTDs, such as spina bifida in your family, or you are taking medication for epilepsy, then you should first consult your doctor.

Is everyone's baby at risk? YES

- Whatever your age
- Whether you're a first-time mother or already have children
- Even if spina bifida doesn't run in your family and you are in the best of health
- There is a higher risk if you have already given birth to a baby with this condition

Tell me what risk?

NTDs are caused when the neural tube, which will become the baby's spine, does not form properly very early in pregnancy.

This has been linked to a lack of folic acid. Taking extra folic acid before becoming

pregnant and during early pregnancy can reduce the risk of your baby being affected by spina bifida and other NTDs by approximately 70%.

How can I get enough folic acid to help prevent spina bifida?

The best way to get enough folic acid to help prevent spina bifida and other NTDs is to **take one folic acid tablet (400 micrograms) every day.**

You can buy these over the counter from your chemist or you can get them free of charge on prescription from your doctor if you have a medical card. **Make sure you are taking a tablet that contains only folic acid and not a multivitamin tablet.**

When should I start?

Right now if there is any possibility that you will become pregnant.

Remember, 50% of all pregnancies are unplanned. Even if you do not become pregnant, folic acid is beneficial – it is a B vitamin and your body automatically gets rid of any excess.