



U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommends Folic Acid Supplementation for the Prevention of Neural Tube Defects

*Task Force found evidence that reaffirms folic acid supplements reduce the risk of neural tube defects
in developing babies*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – January 10, 2017 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published a final recommendation statement and evidence summary on folic acid supplementation for the prevention of neural tube defects. The Task Force recommends that all women who are planning or able to become pregnant take a daily supplement containing 400 to 800 micrograms of folic acid. **This is an A recommendation.**

Grade in this recommendation:

A: Recommended.

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Neural tube defects, in which the brain or spinal cord does not develop properly in a baby, are birth defects that can lead to a range of disabilities or death. Neural tube defects can occur early in a pregnancy, even before a woman knows she is pregnant. Taking folic acid before and during pregnancy can help protect babies against neural tube defects. The critical period when folic acid supplements provide the most protective benefits begins 1 month before becoming pregnant and continues through the first 3 months of pregnancy.

Folic acid is found naturally in many fruits and vegetables, such as leafy greens, broccoli, and orange juice. Additionally, in the United States, many foods such as flour, cereals, and breads are fortified with folic acid. However, even with food fortification, most women do not get the recommended dose of 400 to 800 micrograms of folic acid per day through diet alone.

“The Task Force found convincing evidence that the risk of neural tube defects can be reduced when women take a daily folic acid supplement of 400 to 800 micrograms,” says Task Force member Alex R. Kemper, M.D., M.P.H., M.S. “These supplements can be taken as a daily multivitamin, prenatal vitamin, or single tablet that has the recommended amount of folic acid.”

The Task Force’s recommendation has been published online in *JAMA*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at: <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A draft version of this recommendation was available for public comment from May 10 through June 6, 2016.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Kemper is a board-certified pediatrician and professor of pediatrics at Duke University Medical School. He serves as the associate division chief for research in the Division of Children’s Primary Care at Duke University. Dr. Kemper is also the deputy editor of *Pediatrics*.

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