

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation on Folic Acid Supplementation for the Prevention of Neural Tube Defects

Evidence shows folic acid supplements reduce the risk of neural tube defects in developing babies

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 10, 2016 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on folic acid supplementation for the prevention of neural tube defects. The Task Force recommends that all women planning to or who could become pregnant take a daily supplement containing 400 to 800 micrograms of folic acid. **This is an A recommendation.**

The Task Force is providing an opportunity for public comment on this draft recommendation statement and the companion draft evidence review until June 6, 2016. All comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final recommendation and final evidence review.

Neural tube defects, in which the brain or spinal cord does not develop properly in a baby, can occur early in a pregnancy, even before a woman knows she is pregnant. Taking folic acid before and during pregnancy can help protect against neural tube defects.

Folic acid is found naturally in many fruits and vegetables, such as leafy greens, broccoli, and orange juice. Additionally, 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 micrograms of folic acid per day.

“The Task Force reviewed the evidence and found that by taking a daily folic acid supplement, women who are planning to or who may become pregnant can reduce the risk of this serious type of birth defect,” says Task Force member Alex R. Kemper, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement has been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from May 10 through June 6, 2016 at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Name/us-preventive-services-task-force-opportunities-for-public-comment>.

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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**Grades in this
recommendation:**

A: Recommended.

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