

## FOLIC ACID – SUPPLEMENTATION

### I. DEFINITION:

All women of childbearing age in the United States who are capable of becoming pregnant should consume 400 micrograms (0.4 milligrams) of synthetic folic acid, one of the B vitamins, daily for the purpose of reducing their risk of having a pregnancy affected with neural tube defects (NTDs), such as spina bifida and anencephaly.

### II. MANAGEMENT PLAN:

#### A. Treatment:

1. Recommend all women capable of becoming pregnant take a multivitamin with 400 - 800 micrograms (0.4- 0.8 milligrams) of folic acid, and eat foods fortified with folic acid, along with a balanced diet everyday throughout their childbearing years.
2. The PHN may issue up to a one year supply of multivitamins, annually, to women capable of becoming pregnant receiving **any** services in the county health department. It is recommended that the supply of multivitamins issued be adequate to provide the client with enough vitamins to last until at least their next planned visit to the health department to obtain their family planning method. Chewable vitamins are available for adolescents and those clients who cannot swallow pills.
3. Parental consent is not required for Family Planning clients under the age of 18 as long as they are receiving a hormonal method of birth control.

#### B. Client Education:

1. Synthetic folic acid is recommended for women of childbearing age (teens to 50's) who are capable of becoming pregnant.
2. Because more than 50% of the pregnancies in the United States and Oklahoma are unplanned and the neural tube is formed before many women realize they are pregnant, consumption of folic acid daily during reproductive years is recommended.
3. Dietary folate is found primarily in green leafy vegetables, asparagus, orange juice, dry beans, brewer's yeast, and liver. Many cereal grains (flour, breads, cereals, rice, pasta) have been fortified with folic acid. Each serving provides about 10% (40 mcg) of the daily folic acid requirement. Some breakfast cereals are fortified with 100% or 400 mcg per serving. The amount of folate absorbed from food is not enough to prevent NTDs. Therefore, women should take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms (0.4 milligrams) of folic acid, eat foods fortified with folic acid along with a balanced diet. When pregnancy occurs the client should continue to take a multivitamin with folic acid. At the first prenatal visit, prenatal vitamins should be prescribed.
4. Besides preventing NTDs, folic acid has also been found to reduce other serious birth defects of the heart, oral clefts and upper limb reduction defects. These findings make it even more important for women to take folic acid every day.

C. Consultation/Referral:

1. Refer to nutritionist for counseling regarding dietary folic acid if indicated.
2. Women who have had a prior NTD affected pregnancy are at increased risk of having a subsequent affected pregnancy.
  - a. These women should take a multivitamin with 400 - 800 micrograms (0.4 - 0.8 mcg) of folic acid and eat foods fortified with folic acid every day.
  - b. When they are actively trying to become pregnant, they need to begin taking 4 milligrams of folic acid every day (ten times the level recommended for the general childbearing population). The CDC recommendation is to take 4 milligrams of folic acid 3 months before pregnancy and during the first trimester of pregnancy. This level of folic acid can only be given by physician's prescription. These women should be referred to their physician.
  - c. Women should be cautioned not to try and increase folic acid by taking additional multivitamins, as the fat soluble vitamins can be harmful to the women and their developing babies.

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