

Folic Acid: A Necessary Nutrient for a Healthy Pregnancy

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

Folic acid is the man-made version (pill) of a naturally occurring vitamin (folate) that is present in many foods and aids in the production of new cells. Two of the most important times for women to consume an adequate amount of folic acid are just prior to and during pregnancy.

If a woman is planning to become pregnant, she should plan to consume a sufficient amount of folic acid to support a healthy pregnancy before she actually becomes pregnant. By consuming an adequate amount of folic acid (400 micrograms daily for most women) prior to pregnancy, women will be setting the stage for optimal pregnancies. In the case of women who are not planning a pregnancy, it is still in their best interest to consume the equivalency of 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. This will help to ensure their bodies provide the necessary nourishment to support a healthy pregnancy should one occur.

By consuming a sufficient amount of folic acid or consuming enough food that is rich in folate, women can help to avoid a type of anemia that occurs due to an inadequate supply of red blood cells. Red blood cells contain hemoglobin which is a substance on the red blood cell where energizing oxygen is transported throughout the body via the bloodstream. Most importantly, women who consume an adequate amount of folic acid before and during pregnancy are helping to prevent neural tube defects (birth defects of the brain and spine.)

According to a study conducted in Kansas, out of 250 completed telephonic surveys assessed, researchers found that 88 percent of the women reported awareness of folic acid and 55 percent were aware of the

United States Public Health Service (USPHS) recommendation that childbearing age women should take folic acid daily. The researchers found that only 25 percent of the women reported consuming any amount of folic acid daily. (Sharp, G.F., Naylor, L.A., Cai, J., Hyder, M.L., Chandra, P., & Guillory, V.J., 2009, *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 13, 814-821.)

In 2006, the Alan Guttmacher Institute estimated over one-half of the pregnancies in the United States annually are unintended (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2006). In Kansas, there are approximately 55,000 pregnancies per year. This would provide a Kansas estimate of about 27,500 unintended pregnancies.

Keeping these numbers in mind, one can see the importance of educating women to consume an adequate amount of folic acid to support healthy pregnancies. It seems prudent to educate women at every available opportunity. This could be while caring for the women themselves or other members of their family.

Some educational activities to consider trying would be to write an article for a local publication or provide information during community meetings on the benefits of adequate folic acid consumption. Try to insert other positive health messages that promote the health of mothers and babies.

Together, we can all help to promote the important message of adequate folic acid intake to help achieve healthy maternal and infant outcomes.

Information and resources are available on the March of Dimes website at www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/690.asp.

Focus on Abnormal Uterine Bleeding

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant



Providing education to women on abnormal uterine bleeding should be undertaken by health care professionals as part of a comprehensive educational package. The information will help to empower women with knowledge of potential complications that may arise during the perinatal

period.

Abnormal uterine bleeding is one of the leading reasons why women see their health care providers. This provides an opportunity to educate women concerning reproductive health and other health-related issues such as obesity, heart disease, hypertension and diabetes.

More specifically, the following topics may be covered:

- Getting at least two hours and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or a combination of both each week
- Eating a nutritious diet
- Visiting a health care professional to receive regular checkups and preventive screenings
- Avoiding risky behaviors, such as smoking and not wearing a seatbelt
- Paying attention to mental health, including getting enough sleep and managing stress
- Avoiding the use of alcohol and other substances, especially during pregnancy

For more ideas on how to promote optimal health for women and their families visit www.womenshealth.gov/.

Get Pregnant Women and Mothers Connected

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

Here are two resources to help get pregnant women and mothers connected to positive health messages.

- The “New Moms Blog” provides an on-going source of news and information for new moms and also seems to benefit women of reproductive age in general by providing them a source of appropriate health-related messages. Women can also follow the March of Dimes on interactive social media such as: Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Flickr. This can be found on the March of Dimes website at www.marchofdimes.com
- The new text4baby initiative, is a free texting resource that provides information to help pregnant women and new moms care for their health and give their babies the best possible start in life. Help women you know who might benefit from this ser-

vice sign up by telling them to text BABY to 511411 (or BEBE in Spanish). They will receive free SMS text messages each week, timed to their due date or baby’s date of birth. Text4baby is available through the National Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition (HMHB) in partnership with Voxiva, CTIA –The Wireless Foundation and Grey Healthcare Group (a WPP company). Johnson & Johnson is the founding sponsor and premier sponsors include: WellPoint, Pfizer and CareFirst Blue-Cross BlueShield. United States partners include: the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense Military Health System.

In Kansas, you may contact: Joseph Kotsch, MCH Perinatal Consultant, KDHE at jkotsch@kdheks.gov for more information on this valuable resource.