

folic  
acid

is **essential**  
to your  
**health**



and to the  
**health** of the  
**baby** you may  
have someday

**Tell all your friends.**

- Folic acid is a vitamin that may protect you from heart disease and several types of cancer.
- Folic acid helps prevent up to 70% of spinal cord birth defects in newborns.



To learn more about folic acid and good health, contact:



Virginia Department of Health (VDH)  
804-864-7800  
[www.vahealth.org/wic/folicacid.htm](http://www.vahealth.org/wic/folicacid.htm)

The Center for Disease Control (CDC)  
National Center on Birth Defects  
1-800-232-4636  
[www.cdc.gov/folicacid](http://www.cdc.gov/folicacid)

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now you're  
talking healthy!



## It's easy to be healthy

### 1. Take a multivitamin.

Every day, take a multivitamin containing at least 400 micrograms (or 0.4 milligrams) of folic acid. If you want, you can just buy 400 microgram folic acid vitamin pills alone. They are small and easy to swallow.

### 2. Eat healthy.

Eat a well-balanced diet that includes lots of fruits, vegetables, pasta, rice, bread and cereal. Many grain products have been enriched and fortified with folic acid, so check the labels before you buy. Some cereals already have all the folic acid you need.



## It's wise to plan ahead

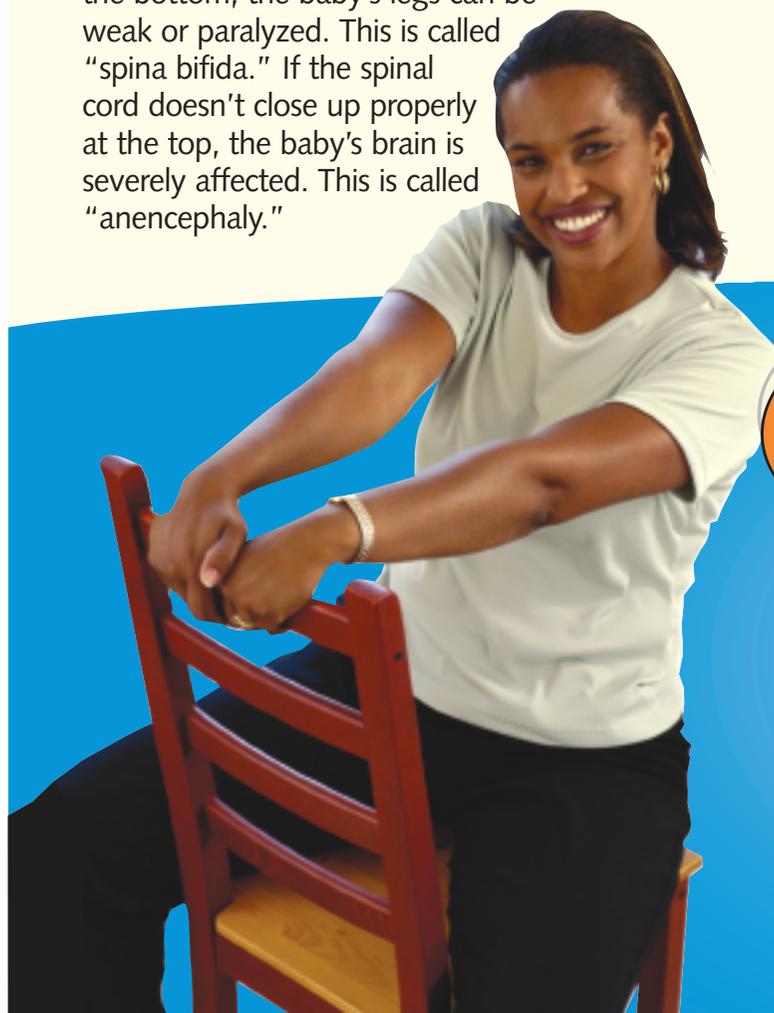
### What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a B vitamin essential to maintaining your health. It is also important because it helps lower the risk of some birth defects in newborn babies.

### Knowing about birth defects

A baby's spinal cord forms in the first 4-6 weeks of pregnancy and then seals itself off at both ends. If it doesn't close completely at the right time, the baby may be born with a birth defect.

If the spinal cord doesn't close up properly at the bottom, the baby's legs can be weak or paralyzed. This is called "spina bifida." If the spinal cord doesn't close up properly at the top, the baby's brain is severely affected. This is called "anencephaly."



### Be prepared for pregnancy

To help prevent birth defects, folic acid needs to be in your body before getting pregnant. No one expects an unplanned pregnancy, but it's smart to be prepared. You should be taking a multivitamin with folic acid now, before you get pregnant. That's because folic acid can only help prevent spina bifida and anencephaly when it's already in your body at the time the baby's spinal cord forms – in the early weeks of pregnancy.

# folic acid

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Some research shows folic acid may be good for both men and women, well into old age. Current studies show folic acid could lower the risk of heart disease and stroke and even protect against some forms of cancer.

