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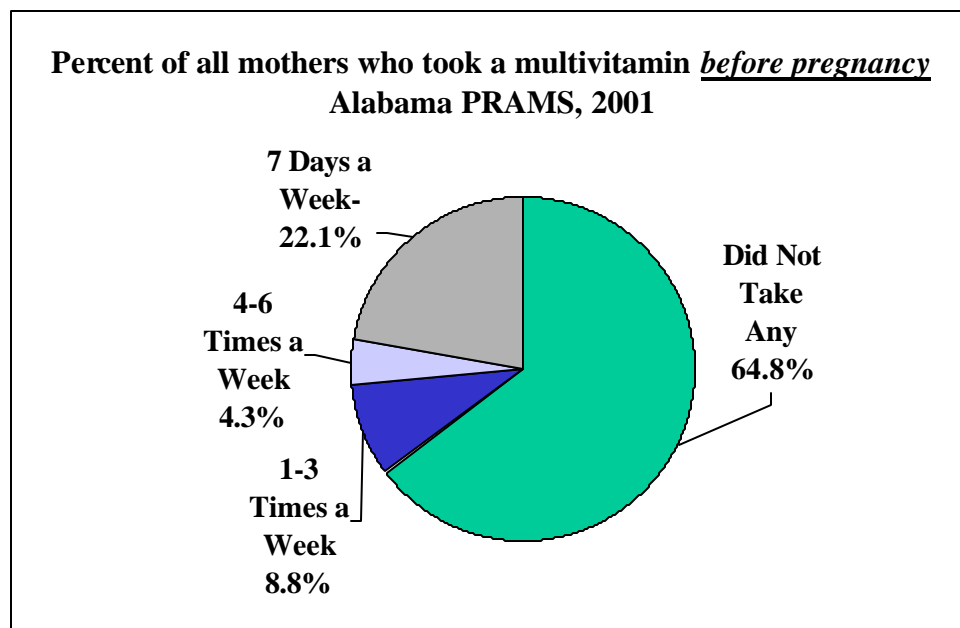


Fact Sheet- October 2003

Planning Ahead with Folic Acid

Neural Tube Defects (NTD) occur in infants when the Central Nervous System fails to develop properly. Research has shown that when women of childbearing age add folic acid to their daily diet *before* becoming pregnant, they may reduce the risk of these defects in their children by as much as 70%.¹

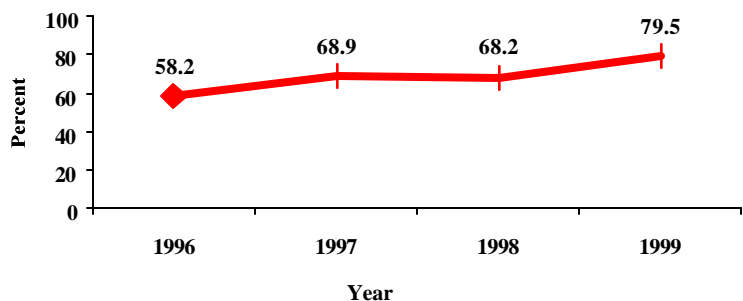
- **What is Folic Acid?** Folic acid or folate is a member of the B-vitamin group and is important in healthy cell formation in the human body.
- **Where is Folic Acid found?** In foods such as broccoli, spinach, orange juice, some fortified breads and cereals and also, in multivitamins. It is recommended that women supplement their diet with extra folic acid daily when considering a pregnancy. (Note: multivitamins contain 400 micrograms per tablet)
- **Why is Folic Acid so important?** Any woman of childbearing age needs **400 micrograms or 0.4 mg** (not to exceed 1mg) every day to decrease the risk of Neural Tube Defects such as spina bifida, anencephaly and encephalocele in pregnancies.
- **What are spina bifida, anencephaly and encephalocele?** Spina bifida is an incomplete closure of the spinal column. Anencephaly is the absence of the brain, and encephalocele is a malformation of the brain and skull.
- **Why is Folic Acid needed *before* a pregnancy?** Because the baby's brain and spinal column are formed during the first **24-28** days of pregnancy, even before you might know you are pregnant.
- **In 1999, almost 80% of Alabama's mothers knew of folic acid, yet in 2001, only 37% of women wanting to become pregnant took a multivitamin daily.**



**Infant Deaths in Alabama due to
Congenital Central Nervous
System Abnormalities:**

2000-	Anencephaly	1
	Other	7
2001-	Anencephaly	4
	Spina bidifa	1
	Other	7
2002-	Anencephaly	4
	Other	2

**Percent of mothers with knowledge of folic acid
Alabama PRAMS, 1996-1999**



2001-Percent of Women Trying to Become Pregnant and Their Vitamin Usage, Alabama PRAMS

Vitamin Usage	Total Women	Mother's age			Mother's Race		Source of Payment		Mother's Education		
		10-19 yrs.	20-29 yrs.	30+ yrs.	White	Black & Other	Medicaid	Other Insurance	0-11 yrs.	12 yrs.	13+ yrs.
No Vitamins	48.7%	85.8%	53.8%	37.3%	44.7%	65.4%	72.3%	41.1%	71.1%	65.3%	35.7%
1-3 times a week	8.6%	7.3%	7.2%	10.8%	8.7%	8.2%	6.7%	9.3%	2.5%	5.7%	11.4%
4-6 times a week	5.7%	0.6%	3.6%	9.2%	6.1%	4.1%	1.2%	7.2%	0.4%	2.0%	8.7%
7 days a week	37.0%	6.2%	35.4%	42.7%	40.5%	22.3%	19.8%	42.5%	26.0%	27.0%	44.2%

QUOTES FROM PRAMS MOMS:

- ❖ “..mothers need to receive folic acid in her daily supplement...before conception...Very important.”
- ❖ “My baby died due to a neuro(al) tube defect, anencephaly...If only I had been on a prenatal vitamin this probably would not have happen(ed)...I hope my story can help influence the importance of planning ahead.”
- ❖ “Before we planned to have our baby, we went to the Dr. for health check-ups... The Dr. prescribed folic acid for me to take every day...’

The PRAMS project is a survey of new mothers in Alabama that is funded under a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cooperative agreement #U50-CCU407103-13.

1. National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, CDC. *Why Folic Acid is so Important*. Updated 09/21/2002. www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/.
2. Spina Bifida Association of America. *Folic Acid Information*. Retrieved 06/10/03 from www.sbaa.org/html/sbaa_folic.html.
3. American Medical Association (CSA). Report 5 of the Council on Scientific Affairs (I-95) Full Text. *Folic Acid Relationships to Spinal Closure Birth Defects and Adult Vascular Disease*. December, 1995. www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/article/2036-2551.html.
4. American Medical Association (CSA). Report 8 of the Council on Scientific Affairs (A-99) Full Text. *Review of AMA Recommendations on Folic Acid Supplementation*. June, 1999. www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/article/2036-2504.html.
5. March of Dimes. *Folic Acid*. Retrieved 06/10/03 from www.nhmodimes.org/YourBaby/folic_acid.htm
6. Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus. *Vitamin Supplementation in the Prevention of Neural Tube Defects*. Retrieved 6/10/03 from www.asbah.org/folicacid.html.
7. Data for this report were taken from Alabama's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), 1996-2001.