



You Are What You Eat ... And So Is Your Unborn Child

--January Is Birth Defect Prevention Month--

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A recent poll revealed that more than half of young women's New Year's resolutions are to lose weight. However, it's important for women to maintain good nutrition when trying to lose weight. Poor eating habits don't just impact women's health but also that of their future babies. Ultimately, it all comes down to following a common sense approach to eating and exercise rather than following fad diets or excluding specific food groups.

Did you know that many women don't get enough folic acid? While it's well-known that folic acid is necessary during pregnancy – unfortunately, the reality is that few women recognize the need for folic acid pre-conception. Of course every woman knows that she should eat better once she becomes pregnant, but what some women don't know is that most birth defects occur during the first three weeks of pregnancy - usually before a woman even knows she's pregnant. By the time she finds out she's expecting, it may be too late to prevent birth defects, especially since 60% of pregnancies are unplanned.

January marks National Birth Defect Prevention Month (the week of January 8th is Folic Acid Awareness Week) and what better time to educate the women in your life about the importance of folic acid. If women of child-bearing age incorporate folic acid into their diets *now*, before they even *think* about starting families, they may be able to prevent devastating birth defects in the future.

Women of child-bearing age can get their daily folic acid requirements by eating foods rich in folic acid such as leafy greens, lentils, fortified cereals and enriched white bread. At least one meal a day should contain 700-800 micrograms of folic acid.

Here are some other startling truths:

- Fewer women are taking folic acid supplements (According to the March of Dimes, the number of women in the U.S. taking folic acid supplements to prevent birth defects dropped from 40% in 2004 to 33% this year.)
- Folic acid may help prevent cardiac defects as well as Neural Tube Defects in newborns.
- Each year, approximately 3,000 babies are born in the U.S. with a Neural Tube Defect.
- Since the FDA mandated fortification of folic acid to enriched grains in 1998, the incidence of neural tube defects has declined by one-third.
- Hispanic women are 50% more likely to be affected by birth defects.
- More than one third of Hispanic women do not associate folic acid with birth defects prevention.

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