

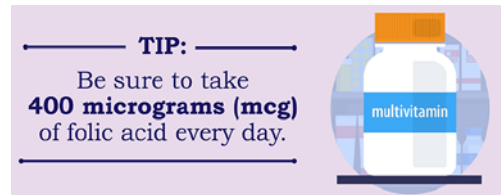
## National Birth Defects Prevention Month

**January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Join the nationwide effort to raise awareness of birth defects, their causes, and their impact!**

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and by adopting healthy behaviors before and during pregnancy. Taking care of yourself and doing what's best for you is also best for your baby!

### **Best For You. Best For Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.**

1. Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.



Folic Acid is important because it can help prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine. These birth defects develop very early during pregnancy when the neural tube—which forms the early brain and the spinal cord—does not close properly. You need to start taking folic acid at least one month before becoming pregnant and continue during pregnancy. In addition to eating foods with natural folate, you can:

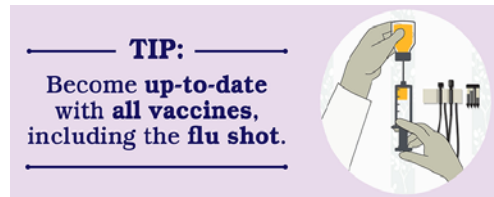
- Take a vitamin that has folic acid in it every day.
- Eat fortified foods.
  - You can find folic acid in some breads, breakfast cereals, and corn masa flour.
  - Be sure to check the nutrient facts label, and look for one that has "100%" next to folic acid

2. Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.



Many women need to take medicine to stay healthy during pregnancy. If you are planning to become pregnant, discuss your current medicines with a healthcare provider, such as your doctor or pharmacist. Creating a treatment plan for your health condition *before* you are pregnant can help keep you and your developing baby healthy.

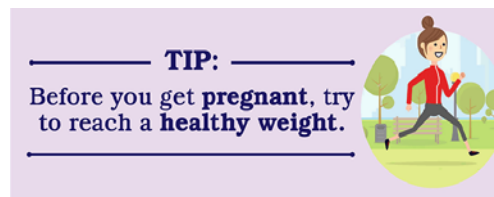
3. Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.



Vaccines help protect you and your developing baby against serious diseases. Get a flu shot and whooping cough vaccine (also called Tdap) during **each** pregnancy to help protect yourself and your baby.

- Flu: You can get the flu shot before or during pregnancy
- Whooping Cough: You can get the whooping cough vaccine in the last three months of pregnancy

4. Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight



Obesity increases the risk for several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications. If you are underweight, overweight, or have obesity, talk with your healthcare provider about ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight before you get pregnant. Focus on a lifestyle that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity.

5. Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.



**Alcohol:** There is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy or when trying to get pregnant. Alcohol can cause problems for a developing baby throughout pregnancy, so it's important to stop drinking alcohol when you start trying to get pregnant.

**Tobacco:** Smoking causes cancer, heart disease, and other major health problems. Smoking during pregnancy can also harm the developing baby and can cause certain birth defects. Quitting smoking will help you feel better and provide a healthier environment for your baby.

**Other Drugs:** Using certain drugs during pregnancy can cause health problems for a woman and her developing baby. If you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant and can't stop using drugs—get help! A healthcare provider can help you with counseling, treatment, and other support services.