

# HEALTH

## For Your Health

BY DR. RICHARD N. WALDMAN



### Reduce Birth Defects with Folic Acid

Approximately 2,500 children each year in the US are born with defects of the neural tube—the part of a growing fetus that will become the brain and spinal cord—which can cause severe mental and physical disability or death.

Spina bifida, the most common form of neural tube defect, occurs when the bones of the spine do not completely form around the spinal cord. Anencephaly, another defect, is a fatal condition in which an infant is born missing parts of the brain.

Folic acid—an essential B vitamin necessary for proper cell growth and vital to the development of a baby's neural tube and central nervous system—is an integral component in preventing birth defects. Women who get enough folic acid have a 50–70 percent reduced risk of having a baby with neural tube and other defects, such as cleft lip and palate.

Folic acid is most effective when it is abundant in a woman's body before she gets pregnant and during the first three months of pregnancy, around the time when the neural tube begins to develop. Neural tube defects occur in the first weeks of fetal development, often before a woman even knows she is pregnant. But because nearly half of all pregnancies in the US are unplanned, many women are at risk of beginning a pregnancy with a folic acid deficiency.

Therefore, health experts recommend that all women of childbearing age take a daily multivitamin that contains 400 micrograms (.4 milligrams) of folic acid, regardless of whether they are currently planning a pregnancy or not. Taking folic acid before pregnancy ensures that the nutrient is present, even if an unplanned pregnancy occurs or if a pregnancy is not discovered for

several weeks.

It's also a good idea to eat a diet rich in natural sources of folic acid including leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, and beans, and folic acid-enriched grain products, such as breads, cereals, flours, pastas, and rice. Most women will still need a supplement because it can be difficult to meet the daily requirement through food sources alone.

Women who have had a child with a neural tube defect or certain other birth defects, are pregnant with twins, have particular medical conditions (such as sickle cell disease), or take some forms of medication (such as antiseizure medication) require 10 times the amount of folic acid recommended for most women. A daily 4,000 microgram (4 milligram) folic acid supplement can be prescribed. Women should not consume large amounts of folic acid through regular multivitamins because the quantities of other vitamins and minerals included may be harmful.

*Dr. Richard N. Waldman is president of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.*

## Health Insurance for Your Child

The Northside Family Support Center is having a health insurance Sign-Up Clinic on Wednesday, Jan. 26 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The clinic will be at the center's

Applegate site at 7650 N. Commercial Ave.

Assistance with food stamp applications will also be available. For an appointment for insurance or food stamps, call 503-916-5875.

All services available in Spanish and English.

You may be eligible for free health insurance for your children, even if your child is not a US Citizen or you work full time.

## Chiropractic Auto Injury Clinic, PC

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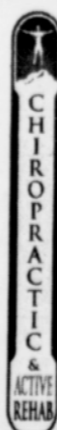
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## HEALTH WATCH

**Family Caregiver Support Group** -- This topic-oriented group offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges and rewards of providing care to an older relative or friend. Meets the first Thursday of each month at 3 p.m. at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital.

**Chronic Pain Support Group** -- Meets the first Wednesday at 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the third Wednesday of each month, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call 503-256-4000.

**Cholesterol Profiles** -- Get the resources to help you keep an eye on your cholesterol and other indicators of heart health. Educational material provided. For more information, call 503-261-6611.

**Bereavement Support Groups** -- Free, safe confidential group meetings for those who have experienced the death of a loved one offered on various nights and locations. For information and registration, call 503-215-4622.

**Maternity Water Workout** -- Helping new moms regain muscle tone, strength, and flexibility, all in the support and freedom of the water. Call 503-256-4000 for more information.

**Senior Aerobics** -- A low-impact workout geared specifically toward seniors. Call 503-449-0783 for current schedule.

**Osteoporosis Screening** -- An ultrasound bone density screening with personalized education; fee \$30. To schedule an appointment, call 503-261-6611.

**Mind Body Health Class** -- Learn and practice techniques to help you improve your mood, health and wellbeing, including effective ways to manage difficult emotions and chronic stress or illness. Registration is \$70 for Kaiser Permanente members and \$95 for nonmembers. Call 503-286-6816.

**Red Cross Certification** -- The Oregon Trail Chapter Red Cross now offers credits to help professionals maintain licensing or certification. For a cumulative list, visit [pdxinfo.net](http://pdxinfo.net).

**Tenderfoot Care** -- Treat your feet with a soak, nail trim, buffing and massage from a licensed nurse at one of six clinics or at your home. Call 503-251-6303 for more information.

**Free Body Basics** -- This physician recommended class is appropriate for all ages and health conditions. Plan to attend this one-session class and learn the simple guidelines for safe exercises, including stretching. Call 503-256-4000 to register.

**Families with Mental Illness** -- A free, 12-week course for people whose family members live with mental illness is offered at Emanuel Hospital, Mt. Hood Medical Center and Providence Medical Center. The course has been described as "life-changing" by former participants. Registration is required by calling 503-203-3326.

**Managing Chronic Hepatitis C** -- Third Wednesday of each month at 5 p.m. The informative session is led by a registered nurse to help you manage side effects of medications and dosage preparations and administration; doctor referral required. To register, call 503-251-6313.

**Better Breathers** -- An asthma educational support group meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month from 1:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. at Adventist Medical Center. For information, call 503-251-6830.

**Cancer Resource Center** -- Providence St. Vincent Medical Center and the American Red Cross have joined forces to create the first in-hospital resource center providing books, printed material, computer access and more for individuals and families dealing with cancer. The center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Lead Poisoning Prevention** -- Learn how to protect your family from lead poisoning. Ideal for folks in live in older homes with children or pregnant women. Qualified participants receive a free kit of safety and testing supplies. Call 503-284-6827.

**Parenting Classes** -- Newborns don't come with instruction manuals but parents and parents-to-be can learn about a variety of topics from pain and childbirth to breastfeeding to infant CPR and much more. For a schedule of events, call 503-574-6595 or visit: [providence.org/classes](http://providence.org/classes).

**Cardiac-Rehab Exercises** -- A medically supervised exercise program for people dealing with heart conditions. For information, call 503-251-6260.