

Eat Healthy and Celebrate

Tallahassee Democrat

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“The first wealth is health;”-- Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In celebration of women’s health, the 10th annual National Women’s Health Week kicked off on Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 10, 2009, The “It’s Your Time,” celebration encourages women to take steps for a longer, healthier and happier life.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reaches out to educate women on the key steps necessary to improve their physical and mental health and lower their risks of certain diseases. Important steps include:

- Getting at least 2 1/2 hours of **moderate physical activity**, 1 hour and 15 minutes of **vigorous physical activity** or a combination of both each week.
- Visiting a health care professional for regular checkups and **preventive screenings**.
- Avoiding risky behaviors, like smoking and not wearing a seatbelt.
- Paying attention to **mental health** including getting enough sleep and managing stress.
- Eating a **nutritious diet**.

Women have a variety of special nutrition needs. For women who are of child bearing age, pregnant, and/or breastfeeding, all nutrients are essential, but one is of special importance. Folate, one of the B vitamins, is necessary in adequate amounts for the body to make DNA, the genetic material found in all cells of the body. Folate also plays a crucial role in the formation of amino acids, the building blocks of proteins.

Women who consume enough folate, especially in the weeks before conception and in the first three months of pregnancy can reduce their infant’s risk of neural tube defects (NTDs), such as spina bifida. NTDs are serious and potentially preventable birth defects.

It is recommended that women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (mcg) of folate to lower the risk of having a NTD-affected pregnancy. Once pregnant the need for folate increases to 600 mcg each day. Folate is found in a variety of foods such as citrus fruits and juices, nuts, dried beans, and dark-green leafy vegetables including collards, kale, and spinach. You can also eat grains fortified with folic acid, another form of folate. Most breads, cereals and pastas contain the nutrient, so check the information on food labels to see how much folic acid is present.

Don’t wait until you become pregnant — folate must be present in the body before pregnancy to protect against neural tube defects. Good health for a new mom and newborn is a perfect gift to bring to a Healthy Women’s Celebration!

Sources and for more information see:

Facts about Folate, Dr. Linda Bobroff, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY186>

American Dietetic Association <http://eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/index.html>

Department of Health & Human Services, Women’s Health Week

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/about/index.cfm>

If you have a question, write to Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 487-3006, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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