



# StarBabies

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A PUBLICATION OF TEXAS CHILDREN'S HEALTH PLAN

## Our newsletter will soon have a new name: Star Moms!

If you've been our member for a little while, you may have noticed changes to the look and feel of our newsletter. This year, to better represent our members, we are excited to announce we have a new name: Star Moms.

Along with that come some minor changes to our website. The content, however, will remain the same. We're still your source for information and tips for a healthy pregnancy.



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## **...a note from Dr. Hollier**

Pregnancy is an exciting time, but it also can be stressful. Knowing that you are doing all that you can to get ready for pregnancy and helping give your baby a healthy start will help you to have peace of mind.

Being at your best health before pregnancy is a great first step to help prevent birth defects. If you have questions about preventing birth defects, be sure to ask your provider at any time. Being informed in advance and planning your pregnancy can really help you relax.

Once you think you're pregnant, go see a provider and start your prenatal care. Getting early and regular prenatal care and learning more about healthy choices can help keep your baby healthy.

*Dr. Lisa Hollier  
Chief Medical Officer of Obstetrics/Gynecology  
Texas Children's Health Plan*

## **January is Cervical Health Awareness Month**

Two screening tests help prevent cervical cancer—the Pap test and the HPV test. Cervical cancer can also be prevented by the HPV vaccines, which protect against the types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer.

**Start the New Year off right!** Call your doctor today to schedule a Pap smear, cervical cancer screening or to discuss the HPV vaccine.

*Source: vaccines.gov*





## Your pregnancy: Month 1 – Week 3

### Your baby's development

Even though you may not feel that you're pregnant yet, you have a baby growing and developing inside of you!

Your baby was just conceived, but already is working overtime. The fertilized egg goes through a process of cell division. About 30 hours after fertilization, it divides into two cells, then four cells, then eight, and continues to divide as it moves from the fallopian tube to the uterus. By the time it gets to the uterus, this group of cells looks like a tiny ball and is called a morula.

The morula becomes hollow and fills with fluid — it is then known as a blastocyst. Near the end of this week, the blastocyst will attach itself to the endometrium, the lining of the uterus. This is called implantation. The implantation in the uterus creates an essential connection — the endometrium provides the developing embryo with nutrients and removes wastes. Over time, this implantation site will develop into the placenta.

### Your body

Getting enough of certain nutrients, such as folic acid, protein, calcium, and iron, is essential for your baby's development. A folic acid supplement is particularly important because folic acid helps prevent defects of the neural tube (the structure that gives rise to the brain and spinal cord), which forms very early in pregnancy.

Your intake of protein, which is used to create new tissue, should increase during pregnancy. Calcium aids the development of bones and teeth, so make sure you're getting a good dose of dairy products, leafy green vegetables, and legumes (beans, peas, lentils, etc.). Iron is essential during pregnancy as you support your baby's increasing blood volume. Good sources of iron include red meat, legumes, eggs, and leafy green vegetables.

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## Folic acid and pregnancy

Having a healthy baby means making sure you're healthy too. One of the most important things you can do to help prevent serious birth defects in your baby is to get enough folic acid every day — especially before conception and during early pregnancy.

### **What is folic acid?**

Folic acid (or folate) is a B vitamin (B9) found mostly in dark green vegetables like broccoli and spinach, legumes such as beans and peas, and enriched grains.

### **What are the benefits of folic acid?**

Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant should get at least 400 micrograms (0.4 milligrams) of folic acid daily before conception and for at least 3 months afterward. Studies show that this greatly reduces a baby's risk of serious neural tube defects.

### **What are neural tube defects?**

Neural tube defects are birth defects that involve incomplete development of the brain and spinal cord.

The most common neural tube defects are:

- spina bifida: when the spinal cord and spinal column don't completely close
- anencephaly: a severe underdevelopment of the brain
- encephalocele: when brain tissue protrudes out to the skin through an opening in the skull

All of these defects happen during the first 28 days of pregnancy — usually before a woman even knows she's pregnant.

That's why it's so important for all women of childbearing age to get enough folic acid — not just those who are trying to become pregnant. Half of all pregnancies are not planned, so any woman who could become pregnant should make sure she gets enough folic acid.

It's not clear why folic acid has such a profound effect on the prevention of neural tube defects. But experts do know that it's vital to the development of DNA. As a result, folic acid plays a large role in cell growth and development, as well as tissue formation.

### **How can I get enough folic acid?**

How can women of childbearing age — and especially those who are planning a pregnancy — get enough folic acid every day?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires food-makers to add folic acid to their enriched grain products. So you can boost your intake by eating breakfast cereals, breads, pastas, and rice that have 100% of the recommended daily folic acid allowance. Check the product's label for this information.

But for most women, eating fortified foods isn't enough. To reach the recommended daily level, you'll probably need a vitamin supplement. During pregnancy, you need more of all of the essential nutrients than you did before you became pregnant.

Prenatal vitamins shouldn't replace a well-balanced diet. But taking them can give your body — and your baby — an added boost of vitamins and minerals. Some health care providers recommend taking a folic acid supplement in addition to a prenatal vitamin. Talk to your doctor about your daily folic acid intake. He or she might recommend a prescription supplement, an over-the-counter brand, or both.

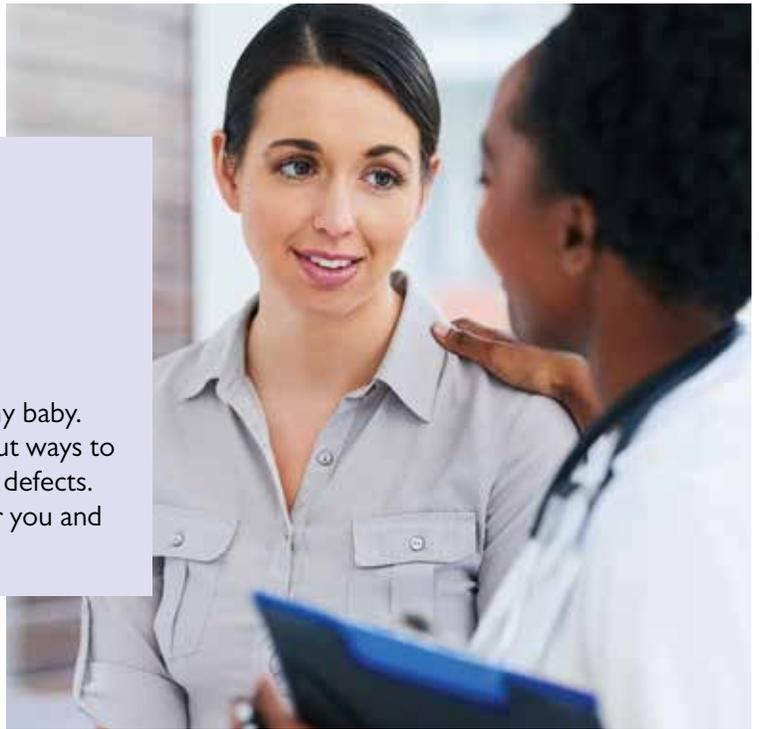
Also talk to your doctor if you've already had a pregnancy that was affected by a neural tube defect or if you or your partner were affected by one yourselves. The doctor may recommend that you take a higher dose of folic acid (even before getting pregnant).

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# January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month

Texas Children's Health Plan wants you to have a healthy baby. That's why this issue of *Star Babies* has information about ways to decrease your chances of having a baby born with birth defects. Learn more about the healthy choices you can make for you and your little one.



## Get the care you need

We want our expecting moms to have a great pregnancy. And that means it's important for you to go to the doctor. After all, a healthy mom and a happy baby begin with quality prenatal care!

**Don't wait. Get seen right away.** As soon as you think you're pregnant, you should schedule your first prenatal visit. Your OB/GYN will want to see you in your first trimester or within 42 days of joining Texas Children's Health Plan.

**Don't forget about your postpartum checkup.** It is also important for you to go for a postpartum checkup after having your baby. Your OB/GYN must see you within 3 to 6 weeks after delivery. To sign your newborn up for Medicaid, call **2-1-1** and report the birth of your child to Health and Human Services Commission or visit [yourtexasbenefits.com](http://yourtexasbenefits.com).

**Cervical Cancer Screening.** Routine pap smears are a key to the prevention and early detection of cervical cancer. Women ages 21–29 years should be tested

every 3 years. For women ages 30–65, a pap smear with testing for human papillomavirus (HPV) every 5 years is preferred but screening with just a pap smear every 3 years is OK. Plan a visit with your doctor or local community clinic.

**Mammography.** Women are encouraged to talk with their doctor about screening for breast cancer with a mammogram. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends annual mammograms beginning at age 40. Early detection can lead to improved outcomes in women diagnosed with breast cancer. Plan a visit with your doctor or local community clinic.

For help finding a doctor, visit [texaschildrenshealthplan.org](http://texaschildrenshealthplan.org) and click "Find a Doctor" or call Member Services at **1-866-959-2555 (STAR)**. For help scheduling an appointment, you can call Member Services, email us at [healthplan@texaschildrens.org](mailto:healthplan@texaschildrens.org), or we can offer a 3-way call with you and the provider.

Call our Nurse Help Line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **1-800-686-3831** to speak with a registered nurse. For help picking a doctor, midwife, or OB/GYN, call Member Services at **1-866-959-2555 (STAR)**.

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