



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Have a Healthy Pregnancy*

*National Birth Defects Prevention Month and Folic Acid Awareness Week  
— January 2015*

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*[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Charlotte Duggan] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Charlotte Duggan, filling in for your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Moms are often worried if they'll be up to the task of caring for a newborn baby. However, women can increase their chances of giving birth to a healthy infant and avoiding birth defects by taking several healthy steps during pregnancy.

Dr. Cara Mai is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She's joining us today by phone to discuss ways to improve your chances of giving birth to a healthy baby. Welcome to the show, Cara.

[Dr. Mai] Thank you, Charlotte. It's great to be here.

[Charlotte Duggan] Cara, how common are birth defects among children born in the United States and what are the most common birth defects?

[Dr. Mai] Birth defects affect one in 33 babies. The most common types are defects of the heart. Other common birth defects are gaps in the upper lip or in the palate and these birth defects are known as cleft lip and cleft palate. Also common are Down syndrome and birth defects known as anencephaly and spina bifida which are serious defects of the brain or spine.

[Charlotte Duggan] Are there any known causes of birth defects?

[Dr. Mai] We know that some are caused by genetics and others by the environment, but most birth defects are thought to be caused by a mix of factors, including our genes, behaviors, and things in the environment.

[Charlotte Duggan] Cara, for our listeners who are pregnant or planning to have a baby, give them some suggestions to improve their chances of having a *healthy* baby?

[Dr. Mai] Most birth defects occur during the first two months of pregnancy, which is typically before a woman even realizes that she's pregnant. Although not all birth defects can be prevented, there are things that a woman can do to increase her chance of having a healthy baby. First of all, don't smoke. If you smoke now, quit; if you don't smoke, don't start. Secondly, don't drink alcohol if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Third, if you're overweight, work to reach a normal weight before becoming pregnant.

Four, if you have diabetes, get treatment and keep your blood sugar under control. And five, talk to your doctor about prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as herbal supplements, to make sure that everything that you are taking is safe for you and your baby. And finally, get at least 400 micrograms of folic acid every day. Getting enough folic acid can help prevent serious defects of the brain or spine.

[Charlotte Duggan] What are some ways women can get enough folic acid every day?

[Dr. Mai] One way is to take a daily multivitamin with folic acid in it. Most multivitamins have all the folic that you will need. Folic acid has also been added to foods, such as enriched breads, pastas, rice, and cereals. Check the nutrition fact labels on food packaging. A serving of most cereals has 100% of the folic acid that you need every day. In addition to getting the folic acid from supplements and fortified foods, you can eat a diet rich in folate. You can get folate from beans, peas, lentils, oranges, orange juice, asparagus, broccoli, and green leafy vegetables, such as spinach.

[Charlotte Duggan] Where can listeners get more information about preventing birth defects?

[Dr. Mai] Listeners can go to [cdc.gov/birthdefects](http://cdc.gov/birthdefects).

[Charlotte Duggan] Thanks, Dr. Mai. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Cara Mai about ways to increase your chances of having a healthy baby.

Avoiding alcohol and tobacco, eating a healthy diet, and increasing consumption of folic acid can be beneficial for both you and your baby. If you're pregnant or are considering having a baby, talk with your health care provider about developing a healthy lifestyle before and during pregnancy.

Until next time, be well. This is Charlotte Duggan for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.