



## Florida VitaGrant Program—A Success with Magnolia Project

Contributed by Elizabeth Jensen, Project Manager, VitaGrant, March of Dimes, Florida Chapter

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The VitaGrant project, a folic acid education and free multivitamin distribution initiative of the March of Dimes

Florida Chapter and Florida Department of Health, concludes its first of three years of implementation in January 2006. Funds for implementation of the program were obtained through a settlement with multivitamin manufacturers.

Throughout the year, the VitaGrant project collaborated with nearly 200 different programs in Florida to distribute educational materials and free multivitamins. The response to the program has been overwhelmingly positive with the project surpassing its goal of distributing 150,000 bottles of vitamins in the first year.

One key partner in the program is the Magnolia Project in Jacksonville, Florida. The Magnolia Project has been collaborating with the March of Dimes to distribute educational materials and vitamins since the inception of the VitaGrant project. It serves as one of five sites that collect evaluation data on women who are receiving vitamins, folic acid education and

materials. Providing the folic acid education and vitamins fits well within the scope of the Magnolia Project's goals.

The Magnolia Project provides clinic-based care coordination and intensive case management for pre/interconceptional women. All Magnolia Project participants receive health education on topics impacting birth outcomes including substance use; smoking cessation; STDs and infections; douching; baby spacing and family planning; nutrition, exercise and safe sex. The Magnolia Project maintains a satellite clinic to provide well-woman and family planning services, as well as prenatal care, to uninsured women in the project area.

Penny Jones is a participant in the VitaGrant Project and receives vitamins and education on folic acid at a Magnolia Project clinic site. Ms. Jones says that it is important for her to take the vitamins because "vitamins help in building my immune system and helps with prevention of anemia." She is one of many recipients of the vitamins who repeatedly return to receive an additional bottle

when they run out. Early review of the data collected through the VitaGrant evaluation sites suggests that many more women would take multivitamins if they were provided at no cost, implicating lack of resources as a barrier for many women to take vitamins.

For more information about the VitaGrant Project, contact Elizabeth Jensen, VitaGrant Project Manager, at [ejensen@marchofdimes.com](mailto:ejensen@marchofdimes.com) or at (850) 245-4465. For more information about the Magnolia Project, contact Carol Brady, executive director of the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition at (904) 279-0620 or [cbrady@nefhsc.org](mailto:cbrady@nefhsc.org).



Ms. Penny Jones participates in the Florida VitaGrant Project and receives multivitamins and education on folic acid at the Magnolia Project clinic in Jacksonville, FL.

Folic acid can help prevent birth defects of the brain and spine and other defects as well.

## *“Folic Acid Every Day” Toolkit Newly Revised*

Contributed by Ron Lutz, MSN, ARNP, FFAC Coordinator, FSHN/University of Florida

The “Folic Acid Every Day” toolkit for health care providers is an educational program and resource kit for learning and teaching about folic acid and neural tube defects (NTDs) in a variety of health care settings. The toolkit was developed in 2000 by Gail Rampersaud, Gail Kauwell, and Lynn Bailey of the Food Science and Human Nutrition Department (FSHN) at the University of Florida (UF). A similar Spanish version of the toolkit was developed for the UF Cooperative Extension Service. Both kits are currently in revision with grant assistance from the March of Dimes Florida Chapter.

### Toolkit Resources

Educator’s Guide includes:

- Information on NTDs and folic acid

- Strategies for working with diverse audiences
- Strategies for working with diverse cultural/ethnic groups
- Frequently asked questions
- Scripted interactive lesson plans, activities, camera-ready handouts and recipes
- Current resource listings

Educational DVD includes:

- Two videos: One video for health care providers and one video for consumers
- CD-ROM with PowerPoint® presentation and color handouts (PDF format)

Interactive meal planning tool includes:

- Laminated placemat

with folic acid tally bar

- 57 laminated, full color food flash cards

### Training Classes Scheduled

The FFAC and UF has begun “train the trainer” classes on use of the toolkit for health care professionals that will include the Miami-Dade Healthy Start Coalition January 11 & 12, 2006.

### How To Order A Toolkit

The “Folic Acid Every Day” toolkit, in English or Spanish, is available for purchase at the UF/IFAS Bookstore by calling (800)226-1764 or at the bookstore Web site at [www.ifasbooks.com](http://www.ifasbooks.com). An online training course for using the toolkit is in development and will be available on the FFAC’s Web site, [www.FolicAcidNow.net](http://www.FolicAcidNow.net) by Spring 2006.



“Folic Acid Every Day” Toolkit

## *FFAC Reaches Out to Professionals Across the State*

Contributed by Ron Lutz, MSN, ARNP, FFAC Coordinator, FSHN/University of Florida

The Florida Folic Acid Coalition (FFAC) continued its educational mission throughout the year by attending a variety of professional meetings in Florida. Exhibiting at meetings and conventions has proven to be an effective way to deliver the message of the importance of folic acid for the prevention of birth defects and for health benefits across the lifespan. Displayed at the exhibits are a variety of available folic acid educational materials. Meeting with health care providers in these settings provides the opportunity for one-on-one discussions about folic acid, current practice, and provides an opportunity to answer clinical questions.

The FFAC exhibited at the following meetings:

- **Florida Dietetic Association Annual Symposium, July 10-13, 2005 in Ft. Myers** – The FFAC hosted an exhibit with one of our partners, the Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC), and provided educational materials, brochures, promotional items and Florida orange juice samples. The meeting was attended by Gail Rampersaud and Gail Kauwell, FFAC/UF representatives as well as Sandi Pate, FDOC representative. Approximately 550 dietitians and nutritionists

attended the meeting.

- **Florida Public Health Association Convention, July 26-29, 2005 in Sarasota** – The FFAC and the FDOC hosted an exhibit with folic acid education materials, brochures, promotional items, and Florida orange juice samples. The meeting was attended by Ron Lutz, FFAC Coordinator and Amy Carpenter, FDOC representative. The meeting included 350 attendees.
- **Florida Nurses Association Convention, September 14-15, 2005 in Bonita Springs** - The FFAC hosted an exhibit

with folic acid educational materials, brochures, and promotional items. Ron Lutz, FFAC coordinator, participated in the meeting, which was attended by 800 nursing students and 275 registered FNA members.



Gail Rampersaud provides an FFAC newsletter to an attendee at the Florida Dietetic Association Symposium in Ft. Myers, FL.

All women of childbearing age should take  
400 micrograms of folic acid every day.

## Get Ready for National Folic Acid Awareness Week January 9-15, 2006

Contributed by Ron Lutz, MSN, ARNP, FFAC Coordinator, FSHN/University of Florida

The National Council on Folic Acid (NCFA) is sponsoring the Second Annual National Folic Acid Awareness Week planned for January 9-15, 2006. The campaign theme is "Folic Acid: You Don't Know What You're Missing!" According to the NCFA, the campaign was created to educate the public about the many lifelong benefits of folic acid.

### Resources Available

The NCFA has made available, at no charge, a promotional kit for National Folic Acid Awareness Week. The kit includes a variety of materials that any agency or group can use to plan a successful event. The resources available on the NCFA Web site at [www.folicacidinfo.org/campaign/](http://www.folicacidinfo.org/campaign/) include:

- **Informational Kit with:**
  - Sample press release
  - Sample letter to the editor
  - Sample proclamation
  - Sample fundraising letter
  - Suggested activities
- **Publications including:**
  - English and Spanish brochures
  - English and Spanish book marks
  - English and Spanish posters

### Florida Activities

The Florida Folic Acid Coalition is joining NCFA in the launch of the National Folic Acid Awareness Week by encouraging its partners, public health departments, Florida Healthy Start Coalitions, Healthy Family Florida groups, hospitals, universities and colleges, public and

private schools, clinics, private medical practices, occupational health organizations, faith based organizations, retailers, and other interested groups to plan activities for the week of January 9-15, 2006 to promote folic acid for the health of all Floridians.

### Remember that folic acid:

- helps reduce the risk of birth defects known as neural tube defects, including spina bifida and anencephaly;
- may help reduce the risk for other birth defects like heart defects, cleft lip, cleft palate, and limb defects;
- may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and depression; and
- promotes health across the lifespan.

With the wide assortment of educational and promotional resources provided by NCFA, Florida Department of Health, and March of Dimes (MOD), National Folic Acid Awareness Week offers a great opportunity to promote the health benefits of folic acid in your community.

### Here are some ideas you can implement:

1) Plan an information table. Offer educational materials and promotional items like magnets. Decorate with folic acid posters. Many of these items are available in English and Spanish at no charge or a minimal charge from the following organizations:

- National Council on Folic Acid Web site <http://www.folicacidinfo.org/campaign/> (materials available at no charge)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site <http://www2.cdc.gov/ncbddd/faorder/orderform.htm> (materials available at no charge)
- March of Dimes local chapter office or visit the MOD Web site <http://www.marchofdimes.com/> (may be a charge for some items)
- Florida Department of Health Web site for education materials (materials available at no charge) <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/newsroom/brochures/index.html>

2) Display ways to meet the daily requirement of 400 micrograms of folic acid by exhibiting bottles of multivitamins with folic acid, enriched grain and cereal products and/or foods high in natural food folate like oranges, orange juice, strawberries, dark green vegetables, dried beans, and peanuts.

3) Plan a "Folic Acid Breakfast" for staff by offering enriched grain products like bagels, English muffins or cereal. Included foods high in natural folate like orange juice and strawberries. For a small office or clinic, plan the breakfast as a "potluck" focusing on the folate content of the food items served. Display a bottle of multivitamins.



Folic Acid: Do It for Yourself.  
Do It for the Ones You Love.

The National Folic Acid Awareness Week campaign "FOLIC ACID YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING", was created to educate about the many lifelong benefits associated folic acid consumption.

## Research Update

Contributed by Gail Rampersaud, MS, RD, LDN, Assistant in Nutrition Research and Education, FSHN/University of Florida

The following summaries offer the results of recent research studies or nutrition and health policies regarding recommendations on folic acid.

- A recent study evaluated the changes in the prevalence of birth defects after folic acid fortification of cereal grains. The study used data reported to the National Birth Defects Prevention Network from 22 states and Puerto Rico. The results confirm previous studies reporting a significant reduction in the number of NTDs since folic acid fortification. Spina bifida decreased by 34% to 36% and anencephaly by 15% to 18% postfortification (1999-2000) compared to prefortification (1995-1996). There also were significant decreases in the prevalence of other birth defects including transposition of the great arteries (12%), cleft palate (12%), pyloric stenosis (5%), and upper limb reduction defects (11%). Even greater reductions were seen in Hispanic women for common truncus (45%) and upper limb reduction defects (44%). The study found significant increases in the prevalence of obstructive genitourinary defects (12%) and Down syndrome (7%), but not among programs that conducted prenatal surveillance. An increase in maternal age could have accounted for the observed increase in the prevalence of Down syndrome. These data suggest the positive effect that folic acid may have on the prevalence of not only NTDs, but other serious

birth defects. [Canfield MA, et al. (2005) *Birth Defects Research (Part A)*. 73:679-689.]

- An analysis using NHANES data collected during prefortification (1988-1994) and postfortification (1999-2000) time periods reports that mandatory fortification is associated with a significant increase in both serum and red blood cell (RBC) folate concentrations in all gender and age groups. Compared to prefortification, dietary folate intake increased by a mean of 76 micrograms/day, and the prevalence of individuals with low serum or RBC folate decreased dramatically. Despite these increases, less than 10% of women of childbearing age had RBC folate concentrations at levels shown to be associated with a significant reduction in NTDs risk, suggesting that women still need to take a daily folic acid supplement to achieve optimal protection. [Dietrich M, et al. (2005) *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*. 24:266-274.]

- A recent meta-analysis was conducted to determine the lowest dose of folic acid associated with maximal reduction in blood homocysteine concentration. The researchers reviewed 25 randomized controlled trials that included almost 2,600 study subjects. The study reports that folic acid doses  $\geq$  800 micrograms/day achieved maximal reduction in homocysteine concentrations

achievable through folic acid supplementation, while daily doses of 400 micrograms, an amount found in most multivitamin supplements, achieved 90% of the maximal reduction.

[Homocysteine Lowering Trialists' Collaboration. (2005) *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 82:806-812.]

- Three recently published studies report on the association between homocysteine and B vitamins, including folate, and cognitive function in middle-aged and older adults.

The first study included 321 aging men (average age 67 years at baseline) and reports that low dietary intake or blood status of several vitamins, including vitamin B6 and folate, and high blood levels of homocysteine were predictive of cognitive decline. In the same journal, a study of 816 dementia-free men and women (average age 74 years) were followed for an average of four years. During that time, 112 subjects were diagnosed with dementia. Both elevated plasma homocysteine and low blood folate concentrations were significantly associated with an approximately two-fold increased risk for dementia or Alzheimer's disease. A large prospective cohort study evaluated cognitive function and homocysteine concentrations in almost 3,000 individuals in the Framingham Offspring Study. Participants included those who had undergone neuropsychological

testing, were over 40 years of age, and for whom data on cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular risk factors, and homocysteine and vitamin status were available. Results indicate that higher homocysteine concentrations were significantly associated with decreased cognitive performance, even after adjusting for B vitamin status, but only in subjects over the age of 60 years. Studies have shown that folate can be effective in lowering blood homocysteine concentrations.

[Tucker KL, et al. (2005) *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 82:627-635.]

Ravaglia G, et al. (2005) *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 82:636-643.]

Elias MF, et al. (2005) *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 162:644-653.]

The results confirm previous studies reporting a significant reduction in the number of NTDs since folic acid fortification. Spina bifida decreased by 34% to 36% and anencephaly by 15% to 18% postfortification (1999-2000) compared to prefortification (1995-1996). [Canfield MA, et al. (2005) *Birth Defects Research (Part A)*. 73:679-689.]

Fifty percent (50%) of all pregnancies and 80%-95% of teen pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned!

## Survey Shows Many Women of Childbearing Age Still Not Taking Folic Acid

Contributed by Ron Lutz, Coordinator, Florida Folic Acid Coalition, FSHN/University of Florida

In September 2005, the March of Dimes (MOD) released their national survey conducted by the Gallup Organization, "Folic Acid and the Prevention of Birth Defects: A National Survey of Pre-pregnancy Awareness and Behavior Among Women of Childbearing Age 1995-2005." In 1995, the MOD Birth Defects Foundation received funding to conduct a benchmark survey of women of childbearing age to assess their knowledge and behaviors relative to daily consumption of folic acid. Since 1995, the MOD and other agencies have conducted education campaigns to improve the intake of folic acid by women of childbearing age to reduce risks of birth defects, particularly neural tube defects (NTDs) like spina bifida and anencephaly. Since 1995,

the MOD has conducted eight follow-up surveys to track knowledge and behaviors related to folic acid.

Highlights from the 2005 survey:

- Awareness of folic acid by women of childbearing age has steadily increased from a low of 52% in 1995 to 84% in 2005. However, the survey demonstrated that **only 31% of nonpregnant women take folic acid daily.** Significant barriers still exist for women to take a daily vitamin, such as "forgetting to take them" and the feeling from women that they "don't need them" because they "eat a balanced, healthy diet."

- Of women who were aware of information about folic acid, **only 19% were alert to the fact that folic acid can help prevent birth defects.**

The number of women who understand folic acid's benefits for reducing risks for birth defects has not increased during the last five years.

- A critical factor to know about folic acid is that it must be taken before pregnancy in order to reduce risks for NTDs. Yet, **only 7% of the women knew folic acid must be taken before pregnancy,** the same level seen in 1998.

- **Only 24% of women reported hearing information about folic acid from a health care provider.** Most information came from various forms of media like magazines and television.

This year's survey demonstrates there is still much work to be done regarding the education and promotion of folic acid to women. More

urgent efforts need to be made to inform and teach women and teenagers about the valuable risk reduction benefits folic acid provides in the prevention of birth defects. As health professionals become more pressed for time with their patients or find themselves becoming complacent about communicating some health messages, they should remember that it takes only a few seconds to encourage patients to take folic acid or provide them with a brochure explaining the health benefits of folic acid.

Visit the FFAC Web site [www.FolicAcidNow.net](http://www.FolicAcidNow.net) to learn more about the benefits of folic acid for prevention of birth defects and for health promotion across the life span. The Web site has sections for consumers and health care providers, educational resources, latest news on folic acid, and more.

## Around the State

Compiled by Ron Lutz, MSN, ARNP, FFAC Coordinator, FSHN/University of Florida

**Family Day – Tallahassee**  
Governor Jeb Bush and First Lady Columba Bush led Florida's effort to recognize the importance of families by hosting "Family Day – A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children" on Sept. 26, 2005, a national effort to increase parental involvement within the lives of their children as a simple, effective way to reduce youth substance abuse. This was also an opportunity to discuss healthy eating habits and the benefits of adequate folic acid consumption across the lifespan. A Family Day event was held at the Capital Rotunda in Tallahas-

see and the Florida Department of Health and March of Dimes were there to promote good health. Elizabeth Jensen, project manager for the VitaGrant Project, was on hand to provide free multivitamins to women of childbearing age and encourage positive preconceptional health habits. MariBeth Wilson, RN, and Trish Mann, CSW, from the Infant, Maternal, and Reproductive Health unit, gave out "flying saucers" to keep the kids active while providing interconceptional educational materials to the parents. [Submitted by, *Laura Levine, RN, BSN Coordinator*

*Human Services, DOH, Infant, Maternal and Reproductive Health]*

**St. Johns County Public Health Department — St. Augustine**

St. Johns County Public Health Department WIC office promoted "Folic Acid is Good for YOU!" as their nutrition topic for the summer. They offered a folic acid newsletter, free multivitamins, and brochures to all women who came in for WIC services. They also exhibited at the St. Johns County Employee Health Fair September 28, 2005 to promote the benefits of folic acid with literature and free multi-

vitamins. Approximately 400 participants visited their booth. The agency is now making plans for National Folic Acid Awareness Week 2006.

[Submitted by, *Susan Vetter, BS, LD, WIC Coordinator*]

**Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition — Jacksonville**

The NE Florida Healthy Start Coalition hosted a "Folic Acid Every Day" Toolkit training on December 7, 2005 presented by the Florida Folic Acid Coalition and the University of Florida. Participants included health care professionals and health workers from nine regional agencies serving women.

Up to 70% of neural tube defects could be prevented if all women of childbearing age took folic acid.

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### Florida Folic Acid Coalition

#### Mission:

to decrease the incidence of folic acid preventable birth defects and to reduce chronic disease risk in Floridians

#### Vision:

As a result of the Coalition's efforts, this simple primary prevention strategy will result in fewer pregnancies affected by folic acid preventable birth defects. More Floridians will experience the indirect health benefits of taking a daily multivitamin to enhance health throughout their lifespan.

**VISIT US ON THE WEB!**  
**WWW.FOLICACIDNOW.NET**

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## Current & Upcoming Events

### Events From Across The State

#### January 1 — 31, 2006: National Birth Defects Prevention Month

Sponsored by March of Dimes, visit [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com) for more information or to find a local chapter near you.

#### January 30 - February 2, 2006: National Birth Defects Prevention Network Annual Meeting, Arlington, VA

#### February 16, 2006: Florida Folic Acid Coalition Meet- ing, Gainesville, FL

#### January 9 - 15, 2006: National Folic Acid Awareness Week

Sponsored by the National Council on Folic Acid, visit [www.FolicAcidInfo.org](http://www.FolicAcidInfo.org) for more information. National Folic Acid Awareness Week is promoted in Florida by the FFAC and its partners, visit [wwwFolicAcidNow.net](http://wwwFolicAcidNow.net) for information on folic acid and additional resources.



“Family Day” Sept. 26, 2005 - Tallahassee



UF March of Dimes Collegiate Council “Folic Acid Breakfast” Nov. 4, 2005 — Gainesville