

A recent study involving over 85,000 children has shown a correlation between prenatal folic acid supplement intake, and a reduced risk of autism spectrum disorders in children.

Prenatal Folic Acid Supplement Intake and Risk of Autism in Children

Folic acid is a water soluble B vitamin that in addition to being found naturally in a wide variety of foods, can be found in fortified grain products and in most multivitamin supplements. The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of folate for pregnant women is set at 600 µg to help reduce the risk of spina bifida and other neural tube defects in infants. A new study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) has found that there might be additional health benefits associated with folic acid supplementation.

This study draws upon data that was collected in the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study. This study includes data on mothers and 85,176 babies who were born between 2002-2008. Age at follow-up ranged from 3.3 through 10.2 years (mean = 6.4 years). Mother's dietary intake was recorded before and during pregnancy. Analysis of this data focused specifically on folic acid supplement intake between the period 4 weeks before pregnancy to 8 weeks after pregnancy.

By the end of the follow-up period, 270 children in the study had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), which includes autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder. In mothers who had not taken folic acid supplements during the target time period, 0.21% of their children had been diagnosed with ASDs, while only 0.10% of the children whose mothers had taken folic acid supplements had been diagnosed with ASDs. The adjusted risk indicates that those children whose mothers had taken folic acid supplements were 39% less likely to have been diagnosed with ASDs.

While more research is needed, these results provide even more evidence to support the use of supplements containing folic acid before and during pregnancy.

Surén P, Roth C, Bresnahan M, et al. Association between maternal use of folic acid supplements and risk of autism spectrum disorders in children. JAMA. 2013 Feb 13;309(6):570-7.