

# Feeding from page B6

start with. One teaspoon of cereal can be mixed with one ounce of breast milk or formula. It should not be given in the bottle. Get your baby used to the spoon. Pureed vegetables, fruits and meats can also be given. It may be a good idea to introduce vegetables before fruits; starting with fruits can make the baby less likely to accept vegetables

later on. You may use foods prepared at home or those obtained commercially. When you prepare food at home, you do not need to add salt or sugar. Honey should not be added to the food, water or formula fed to infants under 12 months of age because of its association with infant botulism. Feeding your baby is one of the

most important challenges that you'll face as a parent. If you have any questions, ask your pediatrician to help you find answers and solutions that apply specifically to you and your infant. Dr. Basel Khatib is a Dearborn pediatrician affiliated with Oakwood Healthcare System. He can be reached at (313) 624-3005.

# Babies from page B6

**Folic acid**  
In her career as a pediatric neurosurgeon, Dr. Karin Muraszko has helped hundreds of children born with debilitating spine birth defects - even while coping with the effects of her own, a mild form of spina bifida.

The key to preventing such problems, she and other experts say, is getting enough of a common B vitamin called folic acid both before and during pregnancy. If all women of childbearing age took vitamin supplements and changed their diets to include more foods that contain folic acid - including green leafy vegetables, beans and oranges - the result could be a major cut in the number of babies born with spine and brain, or neural tube, defects, explained Muraszko.

**It's the key**  
"Folic acid is key for women in their childbearing years because it affects the fetus at a crucial time in development when the brain and spinal cord are forming," said Muraszko. "Since this occurs within the first four to six weeks, generally before a woman even knows she's pregnant, it's extremely important that women take folic acid before they become pregnant."

How can such a simple nutrient stop such a complex problem? It has to do with the intricate process of fetal development, in which different kinds of tissues and organs form during preg-

nancy. "Folic acid allows the fetus to have the best possible opportunity to avoid development anomalies of the brain and spinal cord," Muraszko. "There's a group of birth defects called neural tube defects, which together represent the result of serious defects in the development of the brain and spinal cord."

The neural tube is the structure within a young fetus, or embryo, that develops into the brain and spinal cord. In most fetuses, the process goes smoothly. But in some pregnancies, something goes wrong during neural tube development - for example, the tube may fail to close properly.

**Dangers**  
If the brain develops abnormally, a child can be born with a condition called an encephalocele, in which the brain is not entirely within the skull. Or they can fail to develop a full brain, a fatal condition called anencephaly that usually results in miscarriage or death soon after birth. A birth defect caused by a problem in spinal cord and spine development is called spina bifida, which can range from a small defect in the spine to a serious condition called a myelomeningocele.

In such children, the spinal cord doesn't, in fact, form a cord, and in fact is an open flat area in which there isn't any covering on the spinal cord," Muraszko. "This happens within the first

month of pregnancy, and these children are then affected for the rest of their lives. They'll often have other anomalies because of this open defect of their spine, giving them difficulties with their ability to walk and with control of their bladder and bowel. They'll often have difficulties with brain development, as well."

**Large numbers**  
About 2,500 children are born in the United States each year with neural tube defects, and an untold number of miscarriages and stillbirths result from such problems. The fact that there's an easy way to prevent such dramatic and life-altering conditions should be enough to convince women to get more folic acid, said Muraszko.

Since folic acid may also help prevent health problems such as heart disease and colon cancer, all adults should make sure they get the recommended 400 micrograms a day from food and vitamin pills.

Dr. Barbara Luke is a professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, author, registered dietitian, and a public health nutrition expert. Her book, "Program Your Baby's Health: The Pregnancy Diet for Your Child's Lifelong Well-Being" is a Ballantine Wellspring Trade Paperback Original, available for \$14. The book was co-authored by Tamara Eberlein, author of several books and articles on health, parenting and psychology in national women's magazines.

## MEDICAL DATEBOOK




**MON, APRIL 9**  
**CELIAC SPRUCE**  
The Tri-County Celiac Spruce Support Group will meet at 7 p.m. in the Southfield Presbyterian Church, 21675 W. Ten Mile Road, east of Lahar, Southfield. Guest speaker is Betty Hagman, well-known author of four gluten-free cookbooks. For more information, call Claire Cayer at (248) 647-0076.

**APRIL 10-12**  
**PROJECT HEALTHY LIVING**  
Project Healthy Living services will be offered by Botaford General Hospital 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Livonia Mall (29514 Seven Mile, Livonia). Registration begins near Fanny Farmer. Free services include height/weight, vision, hearing, blood pressure, glaucoma, counseling/referral, nutrition counseling, medication counseling, podiatry, lung function testing, health displays and

Ask the Doctor. Optional test for a nominal fee include: Comprehensive Blood Panel (22 Profile), \$30; PSA (Prostate Cancer), \$25; CA-125 (Ovarian Cancer), \$25; H. Pylori (stomach ailments), \$8; and Colorectal Cancer Kits, \$15; and Healthy Kids & Family Day is April 12. Health screening for school-aged children, prizes, giveaways and raffles. Bonus days are May 9 and 10 at Livonia Mall. Call (248) 424-8600.

Please see MEDICAL, B6

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