

# FOLIC USE AND AWARENESS AMONG FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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**Background:** Neural tube defects (NTDs) are among the most common birth defects, contributing to infant mortality and serious disability. It includes defects of the spine (for example, spina bifida), and the brain (for example, anencephaly) that occur during early pregnancy, often before a woman knows she is pregnant.<sup>10</sup> NTDs are congenital malformations occurring during early intrauterine life around three to four weeks of gestation by failure of closure of the neural tube which eventually forms the central nervous system<sup>5</sup> Folic acid was discovered to have a connection with neural tube defects (NTDs) in the early 1960's<sup>13</sup>. Folic acid, or folate, is a water-soluble B vitamin with no known toxicity

**Objectives:** The main objective of this study is to determine female college students' awareness of the importance of folic acid in their diet.

**Design:** The target population for this study was University (College) students in the vicinity of Trinidad. The sample size of the population was 100 students, aged 18-45 years. The study was carried out in the month of April 2011, where questionnaires were self-administered to the students. The questionnaire contained 21 questions. The significant value was set at  $P < .05$ , to determine the significant values in the study. The analysis and data entry was done using SPSS for windows version 12.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

**Results:** The study indicated that those among the age groups 25-34 years and 35-45 years were more aware of folic acid and its use for women of child-bearing age, compared to those in the age group of 18-24 who were the least aware. Participants within the age group of 18-24 years, had very significant values ( $P < 0.003$ ) (69%) on the consideration of taking folic acid if they knew the importance/benefits of it, and ( $P < 0.000$ ) (83.7%) of those who would take folic acid before pregnancy.

**Conclusion:** The study found, that the majority of the study population is not aware of the importance and use of folic acid. They were not aware of its use for women of child-bearing age, what birth defects it helped in preventing, the amounts that should be taken for pregnant and non-pregnant women, and when is the consumption of it most important.