

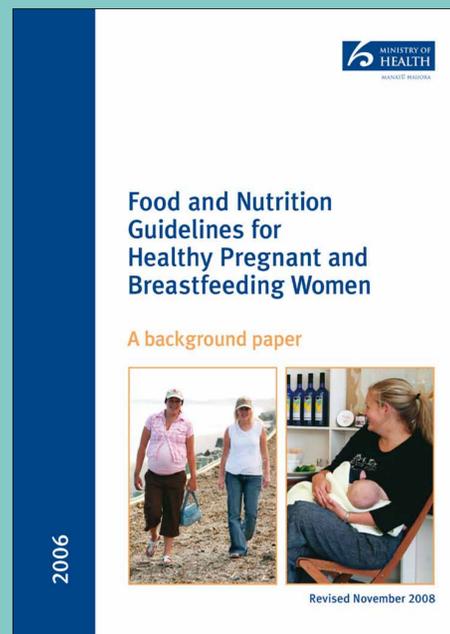
What midwives need to know about iodine and folic acid tablets

Barbara Hegan, Ministry of Health

Food and nutrition advice for your clients

A balanced diet will meet most nutrient requirements for healthy women during pregnancy and breastfeeding with the exception of folic acid, the synthetic form of the B vitamin, folate; and the mineral, iodine.

The Ministry's *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women: A background paper* (2006) summarises the latest evidence.



Why folic acid and iodine tablets?

Folic acid reduces the risk of a neural tube defect (NTD) affected pregnancy, such as spina bifida.

Requirements for folate/folic acid increase considerably in the early stages of pregnancy, and women are recommended to take a daily folic acid tablet to meet the recommended intake (Table 1).

Iodine is essential for brain development and growth of the fetus and infant.

Even with mandatory fortification of bread with iodine since 2009, it is difficult for pregnant and breastfeeding women to meet their increased iodine requirements (Table 1).

Prescribing folic acid and iodine tablets

The Ministry of Health recommends folic acid and iodine tablets funded by PHARMAC and are, therefore, a low cost for your clients.

As registered medicines, these tablets meet strict quality and safety standards.

They are available from pharmacies, either on prescription or over the counter.

Table 1: Recommended tablets healthy pregnant and breastfeeding women can access from New Zealand pharmacies

Daily tablet	Daily dose*	Take at least one month before pregnancy	Take from confirmation of pregnancy until the end of week 12 of pregnancy	Take for remainder of pregnancy and duration of breastfeeding
Folic acid (Apo-Folic Acid)	800 mcg (0.8 mg) or 5000 mcg (5 mg) if at high risk**	Yes	Yes	No
Iodine (NeuroKare)	150 mcg (0.15 mg)	No	Yes	Yes

* no contraindications at these doses

** high risk of a NTD-affected pregnancy are women who:

- are affected by a NTD themselves
- have had a child, close family member or partner with a NTD
- are on insulin treatment for diabetes
- are taking medications known to affect folate metabolism (such as anti-convulsants, infertility treatment, acne medications containing vitamin A, and some anti-tumour agents).

Health education resource

Folic Acid and Iodine (HE4147) information leaflets, can be ordered at: <http://www.healthed.govt.nz/>



Other supplements

The Ministry does not recommend multivitamin/mineral supplements or other dietary supplements, such as seaweed and kelp for healthy pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Further information

Order your free copy of the *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women: A Background Paper* (2006) by:

Emailing moh@wickcliffe.co.nz

Calling (04) 496 2277 (quoting HP number 4232)

or download at www.moh.govt.nz/nutrition

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