CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

“The best gifts don’t come from under the tree. Merry Christmas from our soon to be family of three.”

Over the Christmas holidays, a girlfriend of mine, shared that she was expecting a baby. “I’m going to be a Mom!” She found out on Christmas Eve. What a wonderful Christmas gift! Santa wasn’t the only one coming to town.

Having a healthy baby means making sure you’re healthy too. One of the most important things you can do to help prevent serious birth defects in your baby is to get enough folic acid every day – especially before conception and during early pregnancy.

Folic acid is a pregnancy superhero! Taking a prenatal vitamin with recommended 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid before and during pregnancy can help prevent birth defects of your baby’s brain and spinal cord.

Folic acid is a B vitamin that the body uses to make new cells daily – cells for fingernails, hair, skin, and other parts of the body. It also helps protect newborns from major birth defects that generally develop in the first few weeks of pregnancy, usually before a woman even realizes she is pregnant. Folic acid works best to protect newborns if a woman takes it at least one month before getting pregnant. Since about half of the pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, the CDC recommends all women take folic acid on a regular basis.

Folate is a form of folic acid that is found in dark green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits and juices, and beans (foods like orange juice, grapefruit, broccoli, spinach, asparagus, lentils and peas). According to the CDC, the body does not use folate as easily as folic acid, and it may not have the same benefits as a folic acid vitamin. Most basic multivitamins sold in the U.S. have the amount of folic acid women need each day. The label should state the vitamin contains 100% of the daily value (DV) of folic acid. Some fortified breakfast cereals also contain 100% of the daily value of folic acid. Check the label on the side of the box.

Even with a careful diet, it is hard to get enough folic acid just with the food you eat each day. Taking a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid, in addition to choosing healthy foods that contain folate will help ensure you consume enough folic acid each day.

You never know when you might become pregnant. Having enough folic acid in your body before you become pregnant and during early pregnancy helps prevent some birth defects of the brain and spine. Be ready when the times comes!

For more information about folic acid, or about how to ensure a healthy pregnancy and a healthy infant, contact the staff at the Montgomery County Health Department’s Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC).
The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthyMOCO.