

More B vitamin benefits

Because ordinary diets often fail to provide a pregnant woman with enough folate—a B vitamin that aids cell growth—to prevent her fetus from developing potentially devastating neural tube defects ([SN: 3/30/96, p. 198](#)), obstetricians usually prescribe folate-rich supplements. Now, researchers have uncovered another benefit of extra folate: reduced risk of premature birth, the leading cause of death among black newborns in the United States.

Theresa O. Scholl of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Camden and her colleagues followed 832 pregnant inner-city women, 60 to 65 percent of them black. Women consuming 60 percent or less of the recommended daily allowance of folate 28 weeks into pregnancy had twice as many preterm and low-birthweight babies as women getting the full 400 micrograms daily, Scholl's team reports in the April *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CLINICAL NUTRITION*.

Conducted in one of the nation's poorest communities, this study suggests that fortifying inadequate diets with vitamins "could make a big difference," Scholl says. However, she adds, "you can buy candy and chewing gum with food stamps, but you aren't allowed to buy vitamins."

— *J. Raloff*