



baby steps

While folic acid levels are now higher in Canadians in general, the women who need it still aren't getting enough

BY DR. ART HISTER



severe fetal abnormalities, including spina bifida and anencephaly (absence of brain tissue). This is why all women of child-bearing years are strongly urged to take a daily folic acid supplement, especially since 50 per cent of pregnancies come as a surprise to the mother. (And 100 per cent of pregnancies completely shock the fathers, of course. “Huh? How did that happen?” “Well, remember back a few weeks ago when we . . . ?” “Oh, yeah. That!”)

have “high” folic acid levels and less than one per cent have “inadequate” levels, although 22 per cent of women of child-bearing years still have folic acid levels that are deemed to be too low.

In other words, although we can still do a better job at upping the folic acid levels in those we'd most like to reach, we have done a terrific job at raising folic acid levels in general. Therein lies the rub — because some studies have

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Despite constant reminders, however, surveys show that many Canadian women of child-bearing years still don't get enough folic acid. In order to improve the numbers, in 1998, the Canadian government decided to have folic acid added to grain products and cereals. The tactic has been found by surveys to be pretty successful in upping our folic acid levels, but it's one that may also have produced a potentially undesirable consequence for many people.

Thus, as that report I mentioned found, 40 per cent of Canadians now

hinted that in some people at least, higher folic acid levels might speed the growth of certain cancers.

Bottom line: We sort of got what we wanted, namely, higher folic acid levels in women of child-bearing years, but we also may not completely want what we got — namely, higher folic acid levels in the general population and especially the elderly population.

By the way, do you want to know my all-time favourite Chinese saying? Hey, everyone, let's go for dim sum. ■

My second-favourite Chinese saying of all time goes something like this: Beware what you wish for because you might just get it. I was reminded of that brilliant insight recently when I won the lottery.

Hey, just kidding, I've actually never won a penny in lotteries, but then I

suppose it would help my chances if I actually bought an occasional ticket.

Anyway, what reminded me of that saying was a recent report about Canadians and folic acid levels.

We've known for many years that a pregnant woman who gets enough folic acid, an essential B vitamin, from the moment of conception onward, is much less likely to give birth to a baby with

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