

Spina Bifida Association (SBA) Teams Up With Grain Foods Foundation (GFF) for National Birth Defects Prevention Month

Throughout January, both organizations will highlight the importance of folic acid in lowering risk of birth defects

Arlington, VA (01/01/15) – This January, the Spina Bifida Association (SBA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and the nation’s only voluntary health organization dedicated solely to Spina Bifida, is partnering for a third time with the Grain Foods Foundation (GFF) – a joint venture of members of the milling, baking and allied industries dedicated to advancing public understanding of the beneficial role grain-based foods play in the human diet – for National Birth Defects Prevention Month.

Each year, more than four million women in America give birth and 2,600 infants are born with neural tube defects.¹ Consuming folic acid is key to preventing birth defects, however a recent GFF survey with Nielsen uncovered that less than half of Americans are aware of this prevention method. To advance the public's understanding of the important role that folic acid-rich foods, like white bread, can play in birth defects prevention, SBA will work with GFF to share educational tools with consumers throughout the month of January, National Birth Defects Prevention Month.

“All women of childbearing age should be aware of the important role folic acid plays in preventing birth defects like Spina Bifida,” said Sara Struwe, President and CEO of SBA. “Through the continued partnership with Grain Foods Foundation, we look forward to extending our message of prevention on a broader scale.”

Folic acid is a B vitamin that helps a woman’s body produce healthy red blood cells. Taking folic acid before and during the first three months of pregnancy does not guarantee the baby will not have birth defects like Spina Bifida – the most common permanently disabling birth defect in the United States – but it can significantly reduce the risk. Research has shown that if women who could become pregnant were to take a multivitamin with folic acid, the risk of neural tube defects like Spina Bifida could be reduced by up to 70%.

Folic acid is needed for spinal cord development in the first three weeks of pregnancy, often before a woman knows she’s pregnant. Almost half of pregnancies are unplanned, so it is important for all women of childbearing age to take the necessary precautions.² Women who could become pregnant should consume 400 mcg (0.4 mg) of folic acid daily. Women who have Spina Bifida, a child with Spina Bifida, or had a pregnancy affected by Spina Bifida should consume 4000 mcg (4.0 mg) of folic acid for one to three months before pregnancy.

“All women of reproductive age need to follow a healthy lifestyle, whether or not they’re planning to have a baby,” explains Dr. Bruce Young, a leader in obstetrics and gynecology and GFF Scientific Advisory Board member. “It is important that women, even at an early age, become vigilant about having folic acid in their diets. Most of our folic acid and B vitamins actually come from enriched grains in our diet, so foods like bread, crackers, pastas and other fortified foods made from enriched white flour are great sources of folic acid.”

¹ <http://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/spina-bifida.aspx>

² <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/pregnancy-week-by-week/in-depth/prenatal-care/art-20045302>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
01/01/2015

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To create awareness of the importance of folic acid as well as the role enriched grain foods can play in preventing birth defects, SBA will feature "[Bread Trail](#)," a public service announcement developed in conjunction with GFF and share social messages using the hashtag #HealthyBaby.

For information on folic acid and Spina Bifida, visit the Spina Bifida Association's website, www.spinabifidaassociation.org/folic.

For health expert information on how folic acid helps with neural tube defects and tips for including more wholesome bread and grain foods in a healthful diet, visit the Grain Foods Foundation's website, www.grainfoodsfoundation.org.

ABOUT THE SPINA BIFIDA ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1973, the Spina Bifida Association of America (SBA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that serves adults and children who live with Spina Bifida (SB) – a challenging birth defect. It is the nation's only voluntary health agency that works exclusively for people with SB and their families through research, advocacy, education and service. Through its network of Chapters, SBA has a presence in more than 125 communities nationwide and touches thousands of people each year. For more information, visit <http://www.spinabifidaassociation.org> or call (800) 621-3141.

ABOUT THE GRAIN FOODS FOUNDATION

The Grain Foods Foundation, a joint venture of members of the milling, baking and allied industries formed in 2004, is dedicated to advancing public understanding of the beneficial role grain-based foods play in the human diet. Directed by a board of trustees, funding for the Foundation is provided by voluntary donations from public and private grain-based food companies and is supplemented by industry associations. For more information, visit www.grainfoodsfoundation.org.