



January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month and January 6-12 is Folic Acid Awareness Week

The Oregon Health Authority’s [Birth Anomalies Surveillance System \(BASS\)](#) is joining the [National Birth Defects Prevention Network \(NBDPN\)](#) to raise awareness of birth defects and promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. We hope that you will join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

This year’s theme is “Best for You. Best for Baby.” We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. However, we encourage all women to make healthy choices and adopt healthy habits to help lower their risk of having a baby born with a birth defect. Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to follow the recommended guidelines to reduce their chance of developing an infection before or during their pregnancy. To learn about this year’s five featured prevention tips, go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/prevention-month.html>.

Folic Acid Awareness Week, taking place the first full week of January every year, is a perfect time to call additional attention to the importance of folic acid in preventing certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly. To learn more about Folic Acid Awareness Week, go to: <http://www.nbdpn.org/faaw.php>.

5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects

The 5 messages to share with participants about increasing their chance of having a healthy baby are summarized here. Look for handouts being sent to your agency.

1. Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.
2. Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
3. Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.
4. Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.
5. Avoid harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Reflection:

- Which of these messages do you routinely share with women?
- What would be different about how you share these with pregnant women compared to postpartum women?
- Which one can you focus on in the next few weeks?

I'm glad you asked! Weed Killer in cereal



I'm hearing and seeing lots of news about weed killer (herbicide) in cereal and even in breastmilk! What's the deal?

We're happy to help break down the science and help you connect with families! Glyphosate is a weed killer or herbicide used to help with crop ripening and to kill weeds. Conventionally grown, non-organic, grain crops for cereal tend to use glyphosate. Two prominent advocacy groups raised concerns about this chemical appearing in cereals and breastmilk. You can read about the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) report [here](#) and a Mom's Across America article [here](#). The WHO and other health agencies have published concerns about long term health risks related to high levels of consumption of this chemical. To learn more, the State WIC team reached out to Dr. Ali Hamade, a toxicologist at the Oregon Health Authority.

Here's what families and staff should know:

- Breastfeeding protects the lifelong health of babies and mothers. Several studies have looked for glyphosate in breastmilk, including one from Washington State University, and they could not detect it. [More information here](#). Research shows breastmilk remains protective even when environmental pollutants are found in breastmilk.
- Eating a variety of foods is an excellent practice for a healthy diet. We encourage fresh, unprocessed food whenever possible.
- The US Food and Drug Administration, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and European Food Safety Authority believe the amounts of glyphosate in our food are below those expected to affect health. This includes the amounts found in the EWG product testing linked above. Based on the US EPA safety level for glyphosate exposure we find that a child can eat about 5 cups of conventionally grown oatmeal that tested the highest by EWG every day for a long period of time without increasing their risk of adverse health effects. That's a lot of oatmeal or grain cereal!

Bottom line: based on what we currently know, we are not advising participants to stop eating grain cereals. If this is a concern of participants feel free to share the information on risk related to consumption. We continue to recommend a varied diet filled with fresh whole foods even if they aren't grown organically. If there is concern about exposure to pesticides, please contact the Oregon Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Shopping Tip



WICShopper App Update See next month's benefits!

The WICShopper App has been updated so participants can see both this month's benefits and future months' benefits on the WICShopper App. This is info worth sharing! New features work best when the app has been updated. This may require the participant to uninstall and then reinstall the app.



Tofu and Food Hero Monthly

Did you know that if you sign up for the Food Hero monthly you can receive a newsletter every month featuring a specific food? This is a great tool to learn different creative and convenient ways to shop for, cook, and store foods, as well as for nutrition education.

For example, less than half of participants who request tofu redeem their benefit. If your participant expresses that they might not be using their tofu benefit, explore with them what reasons might be preventing them from doing so. If they seem interested in more information on how to cook with tofu, suggest the Food Hero Monthly (which can be accessed online or through the WIC Shopper app) as a resource.

Other than tofu, recent newsletters have featured leafy greens, sweet potatoes, and split peas. Sign up to receive the Food Hero Monthly at foodhero.org/monthly.

Give Them More of the Good Stuff!

Tofu Basics

Shop and Save

- Tofu is usually in a refrigerated case. It may be packed in water or vacuum packed without water. There are also shelf-stable packages that do not need refrigeration until opened.
- Check the *Best by* date on the package. It usually allows a month or more after purchase as long as the package is unopened.
- Match the type of tofu to the recipe. Soft or silken tofu has a creamy texture and blends easily. Medium will crumble easily. Firm, extra-firm or super-firm tofu will hold its shape.

Store Well Waste Less

- Store unopened tofu the same way you found it in the store.
- Refrigerate all tofu after opening and use within 5 days. Cover with fresh water and change daily.
- Spiced tofu has a strong scent and may feel slimy.
- Freeze tofu for up to 5 months. It may absorb flavorings more easily.

Tofu is high in protein, low in fat, and a good source of calcium, iron and B vitamins.

Pressing Tofu

Pressing tofu removes excess water and makes it more firm. Flavor marinades may absorb more easily.

- Soft or silken tofu is too fragile to press well. Use it as is for creamy dishes like smoothies and dips.
- Frozen tofu will have an open texture with larger, visible holes. Press water out easily with clean hands. It absorbs marinades well.
- To press fresh medium to super-firm tofu, apply gentle, steady pressure:
 - Place folded paper dish towels.
 - Cover to help it hold.
 - Add weight (the tofu would sink).
 - Let it sit for 15 minutes.
 - Remove towels.
 - Cut into pieces.

Cooking with Tofu

Tofu Banana Pudding

Ingredients:

- 16 ounces silken tofu
- 3 ripe bananas (wash 2, slice 1)
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Directions:

- Combine tofu, 2 mashed bananas, sugar and vanilla. Blend until smooth.
- Pour into a serving bowl or dishes.
- Cover and refrigerate until chilled. Top with sliced banana just before serving.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Makes: 3/2 to 4 cups
Prep time: 15 minutes + chilling

Tofu "Egg" Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 cup (3 ounces) extra-firm tofu
- 2 Tablespoons celery, diced
- 1 Tablespoon onion, finely minced
- 1 Tablespoon light mayonnaise
- 1 Tablespoon plain nonfat yogurt
- 1/4 teaspoon prepared mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon dill (optional)

Directions:

- Press tofu and crumble into a bowl. Mix in celery and onion.
- In a separate bowl, combine mayonnaise, yogurt, mustard, lemon juice and spices. Mix well.
- Add the dressing to the tofu mixture and stir gently until combined.
- Use for sandwiches, wraps or salad.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Makes: 1 cup
Prep time: 20 minutes

Baked Tofu

Ingredients:

- 16 ounce block firm or extra-firm tofu, fresh or frozen/thawed
- Marinade ingredients of your choice:
 - Asian
 - 2 Tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
 - 2 Tablespoons vinegar (try balsamic, cider or rice)
 - 1 Tablespoon honey or brown sugar
 - 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil or sesame oil
 - Soy Lime
 - 1/4 cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
 - 1/4 cup lime juice
 - 3 Tablespoons vegetable oil or sesame oil

Directions:

- Press tofu and cut as you choose: cubes, slices, sticks or triangles.
- Mix marinade ingredients; add tofu pieces; marinate 30 minutes or longer.
- Drain tofu and place pieces on a baking sheet. Roll on the baking sheet makes cleanup easy.
- Bake at 375 degrees until the tofu is firm and lightly browned, about 30 minutes. Turn pieces once during baking.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Makes: about 2 cups
Prep time: 30 minutes (press); 30 minutes (marinate)
Bake time: 30 minutes

When kids help make healthy food, they are more likely to try it. Show kids how to:

- measure and mix ingredients.
- crumble tofu or cut it into slices, cubes

Folic Acid in WIC Foods

Cereals on the WIC food list marked with an **F** provide 100% of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for folic acid. These include:

- Kellogg's Special K
- General Mills Multi Grain Cheerios
- Malt-O-Meal Frosted Mini Spooners (original and Blueberry)
- Malt-O-Meal Original hot cereal

Other WIC foods that have some folic acid, but not 100%, include:

- Orange juice and citrus fruit
- Fortified grain products
- Dry beans and lentils
- Leafy green vegetables



Folic Acid in Corn Masa Flour and Corn Tortillas

Very few brands of corn masa flour or tortillas contain folic acid. The lack of folic acid is likely one reason Hispanic women in the US have a 21% higher chance of having a baby with a brain or spine defect than non-Hispanic women. Corn meal and grits labeled "enriched" must contain folic acid, but this doesn't apply to corn masa flour. Encourage WIC families to look for folic acid enriched brands!

Reflection:

How would you explore what grains women eat? What ideas would you share?