Effect of maternal folic acid supplementation on breast cancer risk in offspring.

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Vitamins, including folate (often as folic acid) are increasingly consumed in supplement form. Results of studies of the role of supplementation with folic acid in cancer development are conflicting. In a recent study, researchers examined whether maternal consumption of folic acid during pregnancy had a impact on the development of cancer in their offspring.

Female mice were fed a diet supplemented with folic acid and allowed to give birth. The offspring were treated with a drug that can induce breast (mammary) cancer and the development of tumors was followed. The mice whose mothers had consumed more folic acid developed more cancer and it developed more quickly. The increase may be due to altered DNA methylation in the offspring.

Although the impact on the development of human cancer is unclear, women considering supplementation during pregnancy might want to discuss this with their caregiver.

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