

■ **Supplementation with folic acid plus ferrous fumarate during pregnancy reduces the incidence of low birthweight in rural Nepal**, according to investigators from the US and Nepal. 4998 pregnant women living in rural Nepal were randomised in clusters to receive folic acid 400 µg/day plus retinol [vitamin A] 1000 µg/day (n = 941); folic acid plus retinol and ferrous fumarate 60 mg/day (957); folic acid plus retinol, ferrous fumarate and zinc 30 mg/day (999); folic acid plus retinol, ferrous fumarate, zinc and multiple micronutrients\* (1050); or retinol alone (control). Significantly fewer women gave birth to low birthweight neonates (< 2500g) in the folic acid plus ferrous fumarate group and the multiple micronutrients group, compared with the control group (34.3% and 35.3% vs 43.4% of neonates, respectively). Similar results were observed for the proportion of neonates who were small for gestational age, although the differences were not significant. Notably, the addition of multiple micronutrients provided no additional benefit to that of folic acid plus ferrous fumarate.

\* niacin, copper, magnesium and vitamins B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>6</sub>, B<sub>12</sub>, C, D, E and K

Christian P, et al. Effects of alternative maternal micronutrient supplements on low birth weight in rural Nepal: double blind randomised community trial. *BMJ* 326: 571-574, 15 Mar 2003

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