Today’s piece was prepared by Elizabeth Nguyen, MD, based on an NPR article Why Tortillas May Hold the Key to Healthier Babies <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/01/04/456278520/why-tortillas-may-hold-the-key-to-healthier-babies>

This article describes a petition by the March of Dimes Foundation and the National Council of La Raza to allow corn mesa flour, the basis for tortillas, to be fortified with folic acid. Doing so would prevent 40-120 cases of neural tube defects among babies born to Hispanic mothers each year, according to studies cited in this article. Currently, the FDA bans this fortification of because alkaline processing of corn with lime and water would destabilize folic acid.

This article is strongly partial towards the fortification, and while fortification of cereal grains was shown to be effective in the US, the evidence supporting corn mesa flour fortification is a bit overstated. There is evidence that the number of neural tube defects decreased by 36% after the fortification of cereal grain with folic acid, as detailed by resources provided by the CDC. Also, there is documented evidence that Hispanic women have a higher rate of babies with neural tube defects. However, data cited by the article regarding the decrease of neural tube defects as a result of corn mesa flour fortification are only estimates resulting from models based on surveys conducted across a subset of women between 15-44yo, 26% of whom were Mexican American. In their model, corn mesa flour fortification would only increase daily folic acid intake from 212mcg to 253mcg in the Hispanic population, still under the latest 450mcg CDC recommendation. Ongoing research to develop methods of adequately fortifying corn mesa flour with folic acid is needed to know how effective this fortification may be.

**RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES ON RELATIONSHIP OF FOLATE & NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS:**

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefectscount/data.html>

Spina Bifida Association

<http://spinabifidaassociation.org/lower-the-risk/folic-acid-faqs/>

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!