

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Folic acid supplements taken during pregnancy may benefit toddler behaviour**

Folic acid supplements taken during pregnancy may benefit toddler behaviour, says research which shows that they can help prevent aggressive behaviour and attention problems.

“We asked women about their use of folic acid supplements during pregnancy, whether they were taken before pregnancy or sometime later during pregnancy, or not at all” says Dr Sabine Roza, the chief researcher, from the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Over 4000 eighteen month old toddlers were involved in the study which asked their parents whether their children showed signs of aggression, had sleep problems or attention problems.

“We found that the toddlers of women who did not take folic acid during pregnancy had a greater chance of showing withdrawn behaviour, for example, more aggressive and more depressed with trouble with attention”, says Dr Sabine Roza. The study, part of the £6m Nutrimenthe project, will go on to look at how long these positive effects last by following the children to at least the age of three. At the moment folic acid supplements are recommended for pregnant women to help prevent their babies developing the disability spina bifida.

The research was published by Dr Sabine Roza from the Erasmus University Centre, Rotterdam, in the British Journal of Nutrition. She and her colleagues at Erasmus are one of 20 partners in Europe and the US taking part in the 5 year long Nutrimenthe project which is looking at how the diet of pregnant women, babies and children affects their mental development. Folic acid is just one nutrient being studied by the project. Others include Omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals such as iron, and how these affect the mental development of children in the long term.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

#### **Contacts**

Dr Sabine Roza

Erasmus Medical Centre, The Netherlands

phone: +31 10 70 40391 (34946).

e-mail: [s.roza@erasmusmc.nl](mailto:s.roza@erasmusmc.nl)

Claire Horton

The Nutrimenthe project

Beta Technology, Doncaster

Phone +44 (0)1302 322633

Mobile: +44(0)7875243614

e-mail: [claire.horton@betatechnology.co.uk](mailto:claire.horton@betatechnology.co.uk)

### **The Nutrimenthe project**

**A five year study into the effect of diet on the mental performance of children.**

Coordinator: Professor Cristina Campoy, Department of Paediatrics, University of Granada, Spain.

Timescale: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008- 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

Budget: €8m.

Contribution from European Commission: €5.9m

Partners: 20 partners from UK, Spain, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Hungary, USA.

Website: [www.nutrimenthe.eu](http://www.nutrimenthe.eu)

E-mail: [nutrimentheproject@yahoo.es](mailto:nutrimentheproject@yahoo.es)

There is evidence that early nutrition can influence or programme later mental performance, cognitive development and behaviour. The idea that the diet of mothers, infants and children could have an influence on long-term mental performance has major implications for public health practice and policy development, economic progress and future wealth creation.

Nutrimenthe is a five-year study that draws together a wide range of scientific disciplines from organisations around Europe and beyond to study the effect of diet on the mental performance of children. More than 17,000 mothers and 18,000 children are involved in epidemiological population studies and nutritional intervention studies taking place in study centres around Europe.

Nutrimenthe expects to generate a wealth of new information from the studies and link these to the results of neuropsychological tests, biochemical measurements and brain imaging studies. Nutrimenthe also aims to establish positive dietary recommendations for the European population as a whole for certain nutrients, especially Omega-3 fatty acids. Nutrimenthe also aims to improve public knowledge especially that of parents, teachers and industry, laying the foundations for appropriate health claims about how diet affects mental performance in children.

### **About the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme**

The European Commission's Framework Programme has been running since 1984 and is the European Union's main scheme for funding research. The current, Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) is the largest programme to date, committing €19bn for research from 2007-2013 including funding for Health, Information Communications Technology, Security, Transport, Environment. Nutrimenthe is funded by the Food, Fisheries, Agriculture and Biotechnology programme of FP7.

[http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html)

The research leading to the results of the Nutrimenthe project have received funding from the European Community's 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (FP7/2008-2013) under grant agreement no: 212652 (NUTRIMENTHE Project "The Effect of Diet on the Mental Performance of Children").

