

The Evans Family

BBC 1

9.00 NEWS AND SPORT
(8064180)

9.10 LOCAL WEATHER
(5120819)



9.15 DOCUMENTARY
Gwennan Jenkins talks to Anna and Bryn Evans about their determination to conceive a healthy child. Since their first child, Gareth, was born with Spina Bifida (a Neural Tube Defect) four years ago, the couple have been determined to give their son a healthy brother or sister (120900)

10.50 FILM:
Sunset Boulevard

1 5 T H O C T O B E R

A week ago this column singled out the DOCUMENTARY programme (BBC 1 at 9.15pm) for praise. Gwennan Jenkins' forceful interviewing style exposed some of the many ways in which children's safety is compromised by a few unscrupulous toy manufacturers. In their determination to 'turn a fast buck' they flout the law. But Gwennan sorted them out and no mistake.

How unexpected, then, to see DOCUMENTARY highlighted again this week. And what a change in style. We see Gwennan in sympathetic mode, gently

coaxing the Evans to share sensitive details of their plans to extend their family. The joy they experience from their lively four year old son, Gareth, born with Spina Bifida (a Neural Tube Defect) is clear. Their plans to ensure that their second child is not affected with NTD began six months ago.



Review
**RHYS
HUGHES**

Last month Anna's pregnancy was confirmed. What are the risks of this baby being born with NTD as well? Tune in tonight at 9.15 for this touching tale. Anna, Bryn and Gareth Evans can teach us all a few lessons in 'family planning'.

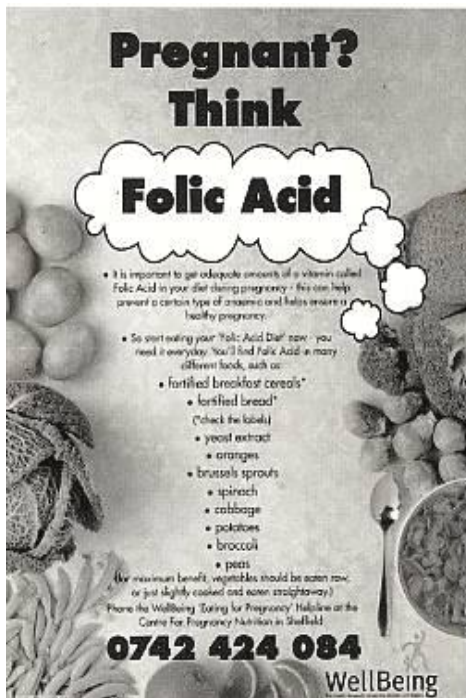
The team of researchers working on the documentary programme gathered together information about Neural Tube Defects (NTD) from a variety of sources to provide an introduction to the topic for viewers who might not be familiar with the condition. A briefing paper from the British Nutrition Foundation explains how NTDs occur:

"The neural tube develops into the spine and NTDs occur if the brain and skull and/or spinal cord and its protective spinal column do not develop properly within four weeks after fertilisation ... Infants born with Spina Bifida can survive, but may have a wide range of physical disabilities of variable severity ... Many affected embryos are aborted spontaneously while others are identified and the pregnancy terminated. The prevalence of NTDs at birth in the UK is now less than 3 per 10,000 births compared with 40 per 10,000 births in the 1970s."

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) had reported that clear, strong evidence from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) has shown that folic acid supplementation can reduce the risk of embryos affected by NTDs.

The government recommends:

- that for parents of a child with NTD, or who have Spina Bifida themselves, the mother should take 5mg supplements of folic acid daily prior to pregnancy.
- that women who are planning a pregnancy should take an extra 0.4mg of folic acid from the moment they start trying to conceive, and should continue to take the supplement during the early months of pregnancy.



A local General Practitioner (GP) said:

"To protect against NTD it is important for women to get adequate amounts of vitamin called folic acid in the diet during the very early stages of pregnancy. Folic acid can also help prevent a certain type of anaemia and helps ensure a healthy pregnancy. It is important for women planning a pregnancy to ensure they have enough folic acid in their diet.

Folic acid is found in food such as: fortified breakfast cereals (check the labels), fortified bread (check the labels), yeast extract, oranges, Brussels sprouts, spinach, cabbage, potatoes, broccoli, peas."

The Department of Health recommends that all women of child-bearing age who are planning to become pregnant are advised to take folic acid supplements. Women who are not pregnant or planning for a baby should be able to get all the folate they need by eating a healthy, varied diet.

Questions

1. What has been the trend in numbers of babies born with NTDs since the 1970s?
2. Why was Anna advised to take folic acid supplements?
3. For a woman who is planning a baby what is thought to be the best time for her to start taking folic acid supplements?
4. Suggest two ways of making sure that adequate amounts of folic acid are provided by the regular diet.
5. Do you think that the DOCUMENTARY programme would help its viewers to understand more about special nutritional requirements at particular stages in the lifecycle? (Explain your answer.)