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**"There is no hope
for the satisfied man."**

Post founder,
Frederick G. Bonfils, 1861-1933

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Choline

Research backs prenatal nutrient; policymakers should act quickly

By Robert Freedman,
M. Camille Hoffman
and Sharon K. Hunter

Guest Commentary

Preventing birth defects by including folic acid in prenatal vitamins is a crowning achievement of preventive medicine and public health. For pennies per diem, babies today are born free of spinal cord and facial problems that otherwise would result in life-long disability and disfigurement. It took decades for folic acid to move from research labs to universal acceptance in maternal care; now another prenatal nutrient, choline, is traveling that path.

Evidence supporting the benefits of choline supplementation for mothers and babies comes from research laboratories at the CU School of Medicine, the Institute of Children's Mental Health and other labs worldwide. The potential benefits — and associated economic savings — of higher prenatal choline levels on child development are considerable, starting with lower rates of preterm birth and fewer low-birth-weight babies.

Because choline does not require a prescription, its cost — as little as \$200 per pregnancy — is not reimbursed by public or private insurance. Because many mothers cannot afford to pay this, policymakers need to consider whether choline, as other prenatal vitamins are, should be included in Medicaid and other insurance reimbursement programs.

The money saved by reducing the number of preterm births and the incidence of mental health problems in childhood could justify the low cost of covering choline. We believe it does.

Preterm birth, defined as three weeks or more before full gestation, increases neonatal morbidity and mortality and requires expensive hospital care for premature newborns.

We found that rates of preterm birth for Black women are markedly higher and related to their having lower choline blood levels than most other women. Choline is necessary for mechanisms in the placenta to form early in preg-

nancy that will delay labor at the end of pregnancy until the baby is mature. Supplements raise the mothers' choline levels and enable women of all racial and ethnic groups to deliver mature babies with normal birth weight on time.

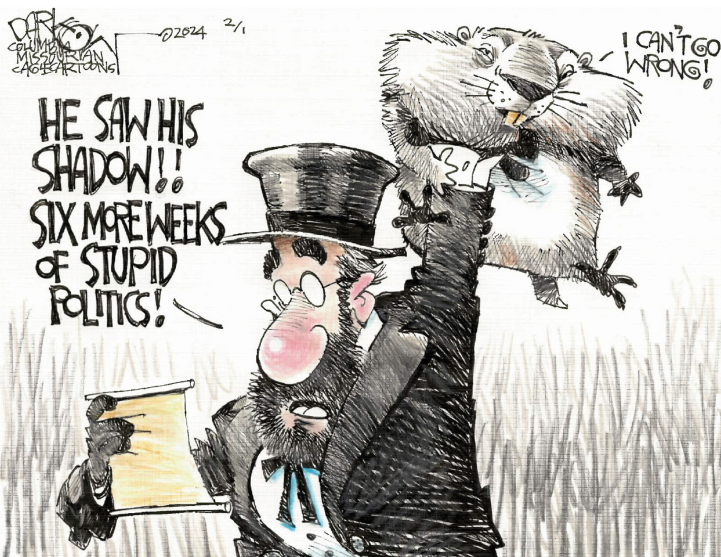
The benefit of the addition of choline supplements to standard prenatal vitamins continues into childhood. Encouragingly, children benefiting from choline supplementation have demonstrated improved concentration and attention spans. They bond and cuddle with their parents more readily, and they relate better to others. These benefits have been documented through early school-age years.

As a natural nutrient, no serious side effects from choline supplements have been found in clinical trials. Choline, like folic acid, is naturally found in many foods, including liver, salmon, red meat and eggs. Other sources include soybeans and sunflower seeds, which are used for choline tablets, capsules and drops. Dietary surveys find that more than half of U.S. women fail to meet the FDA's recommended daily intake of 550 mg during pregnancy. Choline is recommended by the FDA before birth, but after delivery the opportunity to improve birth outcomes and in-utero brain development has passed.

A founding principle of our country is that all people are created equal. Children born prematurely, with low birth weight, and a higher risk for mental illness confront inequality from their first day of life. Choline supplements, as part of good maternal care, can help make equality a reality. Hopefully, choline can reach all mothers and babies sooner than folic acid did, before decades of children are born without its benefit.

Robert Freedman is a professor of psychiatry and pharmacology at the University of Colorado Denver. M. Camille Hoffman is an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology and psychiatry at CU-Denver. Sharon K. Hunter is an associate professor of psychiatry at CU-Denver.

Cartoonist's take



JOHN DARKOW (COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN), CAGLECARTOONS.COM

The Open Forum

Social Security's seemingly impenetrable red tape

Re: "Social Security: If agency overpays, then recipients on hook for billions," Jan. 28 news story

I was dismayed, but it felt somewhat good to read that I was not alone when I saw all the people and dollars affected by the Social Security Administration's overpayments. I, too, received a notice I had been overpaid and owed money. I tried multiple times in person at a Social Security office to find out over what time period, how that number was arrived at and why it happened. It is very disconcerting that no one at the agency knows that information. I asked for a review and the same number was arrived at, despite my account and the tax forms I've received having different totals for how much I've received over the years and neither matching the bill I received. I was told, "Those numbers don't matter."

Also, those who were interviewed for the article seemed to be SSI or SSDI recipients. I'm just a regular retiree receiving my earned amount. So the problem appears to be pervasive in the whole agency. I do agree with the woman who said, "It makes me paranoid." I wonder if I can trust any number that I'm told is my monthly

payment.

I think it would be very important for Congress to look into this and provide either legislation or investigation or both to address this very troubling issue.

— Ellen Staton, Castle Rock

More corporate apologies are needed

Re: "Social media CEOs testify about dangers kids face," Feb. 1 news story

As one who believes in personal and corporate responsibility, it was good to see social media CEOs apologize for their products having caused families harm and promising to exert more control over how their products are used. U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham told Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, "You have blood on your hands." I hope he will say that to the gun manufacturers next and pass legislation to control their products.

— Stephan Papa, Denver

More public control over utility is "worth the effort"

Re: "Xcel seeking rate increase for natural gas customers," Feb. 1 news story

Xcel is yet again asking to raise the price of natural gas. Although there is a degree of state control over pricing, the Public Utility Commission is packed with energy industry

supporters and generally has backed Xcel's wishes with a few exceptions. Natural gas is our most essential means of heating homes and businesses. Wind and solar have made inroads in generating electricity, but gas-fired plants still are needed to meet growing demand.

There is no commodity that should belong more under public control, yet it remains privately owned and exported for corporate shareholder profit. Such are the mechanics of a capitalist economy, but moderating policies are democratically possible, an uphill battle no doubt but worth the effort.

— Robert Porath, Boulder

What we can expect from another Trump defeat

Re: "Comparing Trump's words on Jan. 6 to Civil War 'laughable,'" Jan. 7 letter to the editor

The letter writer says, "Voting for the other guy is not enough for the radical left." May I respectfully remind the writer that more votes for the other guy were not enough for Donald Trump and his MAGA base in 2020? That is the problem. If Trump is on the ballot in 2024 and loses again, does anyone really think he will graciously concede, congratulate his opponent, and quietly go away?

— Sharon Winningham, Denver