



# Behavioral Health Nutrition

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## BHN Nutrition Fact Sheet for the General Public: Spina Bifida

### General Information

Spina Bifida is a birth defect that occurs every day in about eight babies born in the United States. It literally means “split spine” and occurs when the spinal column does not completely close prior to birth. There are several types of spina bifida with the most severe being Myelomeningocele which can result in nerve damage as well as other disabilities. It is unclear what causes this condition, although researchers believe that there are genetic as well as environmental factors. Adequate amounts of folic acid during pregnancy can help in reducing the risk of Spina Bifida. Please consult your physician if you are pregnant or of child bearing years for specific recommendations. Treatment modalities vary depending on the type of Spina Bifida and may include surgery soon after birth. Children with this condition can

experience a variety of challenges including: difficulty with independent mobility and daily living skills (i.e. toileting), obesity, skin breakdown, gastrointestinal disorders, learning disabilities, depression and tendonitis. Due to advances in medicine many people with Spina Bifida can lead full lives.

### Nutrition Concerns/Implications

These guidelines can be used to help achieve a healthy diet. Menu planning and calorie needs will vary based on the age of the individual and their activity level. An individual with Spina Bifida may benefit from a lower calorie intake to prevent obesity. Visit [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) to personalize your food group recommendations based on desired calorie intake, age, height, gender, and physical activity level.

Concern	Causes	Treatment
Weight gain	Decrease in metabolism due to inactivity Excessive caloric intake Limited physical activity Increased appetite related to side effect of medication	Monitor height and weight to ensure healthy growth and limit excessive weight gain Work with RD/ RDN on portion sizes and appropriate caloric intake to promote healthy growth/ prevent excessive weight gain Encourage physical activity as able- physical and occupational therapy may be useful Limit intake of empty calorie foods including sweetened beverages, sweets, and high calorie snack foods Limit eating out to special occasions

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continued

Concern	Causes	Treatment
Urinary Tract infections	May result from poor bladder emptying, not enough fluid intake, and/or poor hygiene	Monitor/ track fluid intake to ensure recommended amounts are met: adults 9-12 cups per day, children 4-11 cups per day  Encourage good hygiene- use of occupational therapist or home care nurse may be helpful
Constipation	Fluid and/ or fiber intake is below recommended levels  Physical activity is limited  Side effect of medications	Drink adequate amounts of fluids preferably water (see specific recommendations above)  Increase fiber intake by eating more fruits, vegetables whole grains, lentils, and beans  (Women- 28 grams/ day, Men- 38 grams/ day, Children- 14 grams per 1,000 calories consumed)  When increasing fiber intake it is important to increase fluid intake as well.  Discuss problems with RD/ RDN, nurse or other healthcare provider for other specific ideas
Feeding issues may lead to nutrient deficiencies that can cause weak bones	Limited weight-bearing activities  Low intake of calcium and vitamin D  Side effects/ drug nutrient interactions that affect absorption and usage of vitamins and minerals	Encourage physical activity as possible, if not possible encourage standing on legs to promote bone growth  Meet recommended servings of dairy products  Encourage eating high Vitamin D foods including: tuna, salmon, egg yolks, fortified beverages (milk, soy milk, some orange juice)  Discuss potential nutrient deficiencies with RD/RDN for specific disease

## Resources for Further Information

My Plate: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

Behavioral Health Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group: [www.bhndpg.org/](http://www.bhndpg.org/)

Spina Bifida Association: <http://spinabifidaassociation.org>

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This information does not take the place of medical advice. Please contact a Registered Dietitian/ Nutritionist or medical doctor for more information.

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