



Vitamins and Folic Acid

Why do I need folic acid?

Folic acid is a vitamin that is needed every day for healthy body tissues. It may help lower your risk for having a baby with a neural tube defect, a serious birth defect of the brain and spine. Folic acid also may help lower the risk for:

- ◆ Heart disease
- ◆ Certain cancers
- ◆ Cognitive (brain) diseases
- ◆ Other birth defects, such as heart defects



Where can I get folic acid?

You can get folic acid from:



Multivitamins

OR



Folic acid pills

How much folic acid do I need to take?

Everyone needs folic acid every day for good health. However, women and girls who are able to become pregnant need to get **400 micrograms** of folic acid every day. The best way is to take a multivitamin pill that contains folic acid. Check the label on the bottle to see how much folic acid is in each pill. Look for 400 micrograms (mcg) or 100% of the Daily Value (DV).



Folic acid
400 micrograms (mcg)
or
100% DV



Taking Vitamins

Some women have trouble taking vitamins. But there are some things you can do to make it easy for you to take a vitamin pill every day!

Can't swallow a pill?

Folic acid pills are smaller than multivitamins and may be easier to swallow. Or try chewable vitamins that you don't have to swallow whole!



Can't remember to take a vitamin every day?

Put the bottle in a place where you see it each day.



Next to your toothbrush



Near the alarm clock



Near birth control pills or medicines

Do vitamins upset your stomach?

Try taking your multivitamin after a meal or before bedtime, or try folic acid pills.



Do you think vitamins cost too much?

Try store brands that cost less than name brands, or take folic acid pills, which may cost less than a penny a pill!



Do you think vitamins cause weight gain?

They don't. Vitamins can give you the nutrients you need to stay healthy and active!



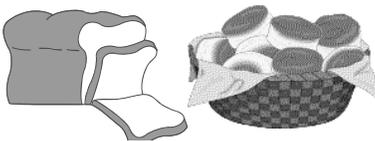
Folic Acid and Fortified Foods

Fortified Facts...

Since 1998, all *enriched* cereal grain products have had extra folic acid added to them. This is done to help women get more folic acid to help reduce their risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect.

What foods have folic acid added to them?

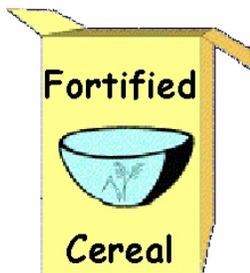
Enriched grains and foods made from *enriched* grains have folic acid added to them. These foods say “enriched” on the label. Check the Nutrition Facts panel or ingredients list to see if folic acid has been added to the food. Here are some types of foods that are usually fortified with folic acid:



Breads and rolls
(enriched)



Rice
(enriched)



Fortified
breakfast cereals



Pasta
and noodles
(enriched)

How can I add more of these foods to my diet?

It's easy! Try eating a bowl of fortified cereal every day, or a side dish of rice or pasta at lunch or dinner. Here are some foods and the amount of folic acid they provide:

Fortified cereal

$\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{3}$ cups has **100 to 400 micrograms**
(check the label)

Enriched rice, cooked

1 cup has **95 micrograms**

Enriched spaghetti, cooked

1 cup has **90 micrograms**

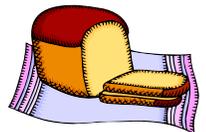


Enriched flour tortilla (10-inch diameter)

1 tortilla has **80 micrograms**

Enriched bread, white

2 slices have **30 micrograms**



Smart Tip...



To get your day's worth of folic acid, eat a bowl of a fortified cereal that provides 400 micrograms (mcg) or 100% of the Daily Value (DV) for folic acid per serving.

Food Folate

Is food folate the same as folic acid?

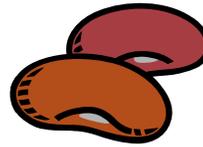
“Food folate” is the form of the vitamin found naturally in some foods. “Folic acid” is the man-made form used in vitamins and added to enriched grain foods. Sometimes the term “folate” is used to describe both forms of the vitamin.

Does food folate alone help reduce the risk of neural tube defects?

Eating **food folate** alone has not been proven to reduce the risk for neural tube defects. Studies have shown that 400 micrograms of folic acid (from a vitamin pill or enriched grain food) may help reduce your risk. But food folate is also important! Women with low levels of folate in their blood may be at increased risk for having a baby with a neural tube defect. Eating a healthy diet that includes foods rich in folate can help keep your blood folate levels from getting too low.

What foods have food folate in them?

Most foods rich in food folate are plant-based foods, like:



Beans

(black, pinto, kidney, navy, chick peas, lentils)



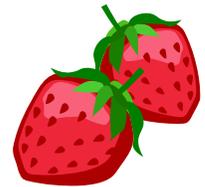
Orange juice



Broccoli



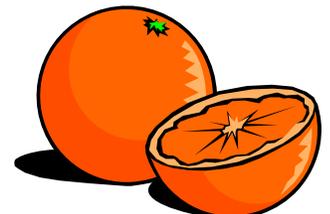
Spinach and other dark greens



Strawberries

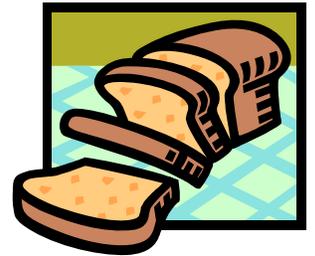


Peanuts



Oranges

Folic Acid Content of Selected Foods and Vitamin Supplements



Food	Serving size	Synthetic folic acid (micrograms)
Multivitamin containing folic acid	1 pill	400 ¹
Folic acid supplement or pill ²	1 pill	400-800
Fortified ready-to-eat cereal ³	½ to 1⅓ cups	100-400
Rice, white, enriched, cooked	1 cup	95
Spaghetti, enriched, cooked	1 cup	90
Tortilla, flour, enriched, soft	1, 10-inch diameter	80
Grits, enriched, cooked	½ cup	40
Toaster pastry	1	40
Bagel, enriched	1, 3-inch diameter	30
Breads, rolls, biscuits, muffins, English muffin (half), enriched	~ 1 piece	15
Crackers, saltine, enriched	~ 5 crackers	15
Breaded or batter-fried meats and fish (using enriched flour)	3 ounces	5-15

¹ This is the typical folic acid content of multivitamins. Check the “Supplement Facts” label to be sure.

² The content of folic acid supplements vary. Choose a folic acid supplement that contains 400 micrograms folic acid per pill.

³ Some fortified cereals contain 400 micrograms of folic acid per serving. Check the Nutrition Facts label on the cereal box and look for a cereal that provides “100% Daily Value” for folate or folic acid.



Folic Acid May Help Reduce Birth Defect Risk

Folic acid may help reduce the risk for neural tube defects, a serious birth defect.

The **neural tube** is the part of the baby that forms the brain and spinal cord. It develops during the first month of pregnancy. If the neural tube doesn't develop properly, mild to severe birth defects can occur. **Spina bifida** (shown below) is the most common type of neural tube defect.



Who is at risk?

All women who can become pregnant are at risk for having a baby with a neural tube defect. However, **Hispanic/Latina women** are at higher risk compared to white or black women.

What can women do?

Taking **400 micrograms (mcg) of the vitamin folic acid** (a “good acid”) **every day** (the amount found in most multivitamin pills) may help reduce a woman's risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect. As soon as a woman, teenager, or younger girl is able to become pregnant, she should begin taking this vitamin **every day**.

How much risk reduction can folic acid possibly provide?

You may help reduce your risk by **50 to 70 percent if you take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day**. That way, if you get pregnant **by surprise** your baby is protected.

More than half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned; therefore, it is important that you **take this vitamin every day**. Once you become pregnant it may be **too late** to reduce your risk.



The Institute of Medicine

recommends: All women who can become pregnant consume **400 micrograms of the vitamin folic acid every day** by taking supplements and/or eating foods fortified with this vitamin.

Eating foods that are good sources of this vitamin, such as orange juice, dark green leafy vegetables, dried beans and strawberries, also is recommended.

Follow this recommendation to ensure that if you become pregnant you already may have helped reduce your risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect.

What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a “**good acid**” because it is the man-made form of a **vitamin** that everyone needs for good health! It has been shown to be effective in helping to reduce the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect, **but only when taken before pregnancy.**

Folic acid can be found in:

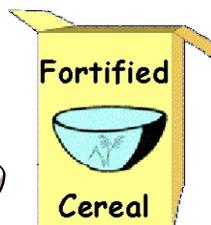
- Multivitamins
- Folic acid pills
- Folic acid fortified foods



Which foods are fortified with the vitamin folic acid?

This vitamin is added to all enriched cereal grain foods **produced in the United States.** Some imported grain foods may have folic acid added to them (check the label). Here are some examples of foods with folic acid (all are enriched or fortified) and the amount of folic acid they provide (in micrograms, or mcg):

- **Rice**
1 cup = 95 mcg
- **Bread, rolls, buns**
2 slices white bread = 30 mcg
- **Crackers, cookies**
5 saltine crackers = 15 mcg
- **Pasta**
1 cup spaghetti = 90 mcg
- **Tortillas**
1 10” tortilla = 80 mcg
- **Fortified cereals**
1 serving = 100 to 400 mcg (check the label)



What is food folate?

Some foods contain the natural form of the vitamin, called **food folate.** Food folate is not as easily absorbed by the body as folic acid, but it still provides many benefits. These foods are usually low in fat and cholesterol and high in fiber. Folic acid and food folate may help protect against heart disease, certain cancers, and diseases that affect the brain such as Alzheimer’s disease. Along with taking folic acid, eating these nutritious foods can contribute to your overall health and well being!



Heart Healthy Foods!

Food folate is found in a variety of foods such as:

- **Beans (black, kidney, navy, pinto)**

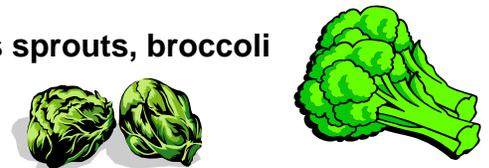


- **Chick peas (garbanzo beans)**
- **Lentils**
- **Orange juice**
- **Strawberries**



- **Dark green leafy vegetables (spinach, mustard greens, romaine lettuce, turnip greens)**

- **Brussels sprouts, broccoli**



- **Asparagus**



- **Avocado**

