

FOLIC ACID: B AWARE

What is folic acid?

Folic acid is one of the B vitamins. It is often called folate. Folic acid is a man-made form of folate which is found naturally in some foods. The human body does not store folic acid and needs a continuous supply to stay healthy.

Why is folic acid important?

Folic acid helps the body use and make new proteins. It helps the body form red blood cells and make DNA. If the body does not get the folic acid it needs, it may experience lack of energy, muscle weakness, changes in mental ability, breathlessness, rapid heart rate, and other symptoms. When the body does not produce enough red blood cells, it becomes anemic, depriving tissue of needed oxygen.

Who needs folic acid?

Everyone needs folic acid, but it is especially important for women who are able to get pregnant.

For a healthy baby, getting enough folic acid before and during pregnancy is very important for the health of the baby. Many pregnancies are unplanned, therefore, **all women capable of becoming pregnant need to have adequate folic acid in their daily diet. Folic acid helps prevent miscarriage and major birth defects of the baby's brain or spine** (neural tube defects). It helps the fetus and infant make new cells necessary for growth and development.

How much folic acid does a person need?

The Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine provides guidelines for how much folic acid a person should include in their diet (see table below). **The United States Preventative Task Force recommends that all women planning or able to become pregnant take a daily supplement of 400-800 micrograms (mcg).** Women who have already experienced a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect should consult their doctor about folic acid supplementation.

Institute of Medicine Food and Nutrition Board Guidelines for Folic Acid

Age	Recommended intake (mcg/d)*	
Infants		
0-6 months	65 mcg/d	Infants typically get the right amount of folic acid through breast milk or formula.
7-12 months	80 mcg/d	
Children		
1-3 years	150 mcg/d	
4-8 years	200 mcg/d	
9-13 years	300 mcg/d	
Teens and Adults		
	400 mcg/d	
Pregnant or Breastfeeding		
18 years old or younger	600 mcg/d	Adequate folic acid before and during pregnancy is necessary for a healthy birth outcome. Miscarriage, stillbirth, and serious birth defects can occur in women who have inadequate folic acid.
19 years or older	500 mcg/d	

* mcg/d = micrograms per day

Where can I get folic acid?

Folate occurs naturally in food. Foods that are naturally high in folate include leafy green vegetables, fruits, beans, peas, and nuts.

The man-made form of folic acid has been added to grain products such as cereal, flour, bread, and pasta since 1998. Read the label to find out how much folic acid is in these products. Food labels often report folic acid as Dietary Folate Equivalent (DFE). This accounts for differences in availability of the various forms of folic acid. Food labels also show the % Daily Value (%DV) which is the percent of a person’s daily needs met by one serving.

It is difficult to get enough folic acid from a healthy diet. If a person doesn’t get enough folic acid from their diet, they can take a vitamin supplement. Before purchasing, read the label to see how much folic acid is in a supplement.

Where can I buy folic acid supplements?

Folic acid dietary supplements can be purchased at local drugstores or supermarkets. **Look for tablets that contain 400 mcg of folic acid.** The cost of a bottle will depend on the brand and the number of tablets in the bottle. A typical bottle contains 250 tablets and is less than \$5.

Women who are planning to get pregnant can also get the right dose of folic acid in a prenatal vitamin. Prenatal vitamins can also be purchased at local drugstores or supermarkets for less than \$10 (depending on the brand and size of the bottle).

Supplement Facts		
Serving Size: 1 tablet		
Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value	
Vitamin A	5000IU	100
Vitamin C	60mg	100
Vitamin D	400 IU	100
Vitamin E	30 IU	100
Thiamin	1.5mg	100
Riboflavin	1.7mg	100
Niacin	20mg	100
Vitamin B6	2mg	100
Folic Acid	400mcg	100
Vitamin B12	6mcg	100
Biotin	30mcg	10
Pantothenic Acid	10mg	100
Calcium	162mg	16
Iron	18mg	100
Iodine	150mcg	100
Magnesium	100mg	25
Zinc	15mg	100
Selenium	20mcg	100
Copper	2mg	100
Manganese	3.5mg	175
Chromium	65mcg	54
Molybdenum	150mcg	200
Chloride	72mg	2
Potassium	80mg	2

.....Education Materials & Resources.....

Folate and Folic Acid Resources (direct links)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Order free materials in English and Spanish: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/freematerials.html

Facts about Folic Acid:

English: www.cdc.gov/Features/FolicAcid/

Spanish: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/Spanish/folicacid/about.html

Folic Acid, All Women, Every Day! card in English (publication no. 995141):

<http://www.cdc.gov/pubs/CDCInfoOnDemand.aspx?PubID=995141>

“B” Your Best with Folic Acid! card in English (publication no. 998331):

<http://www.cdc.gov/pubs/CDCInfoOnDemand.aspx?PubID=998331>

March of Dimes

Order materials at cost:

www.marchofdimes.org/catalog/search.aspx?keyword=folic+acid&x=0&y=0



For persons with disabilities this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 711).



Partners promoting healthy people in healthy places
www.doh.wa.gov/healthycommunities