



WomensHealth.gov

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Folic Acid

EASY TO READ



Q: What is folic acid?

A: Folic acid is a B vitamin. Folic acid helps the body make healthy new cells.

Q: Why should women take folic acid?

A: All women need folic acid. When a woman has enough folic acid before and during pregnancy, it can help prevent major birth defects of her baby's brain or spine.

Be sure to get enough folic acid every day. Start before you are pregnant. Folic acid is needed during the first few weeks, often before a woman knows she is pregnant. And half of all pregnancies

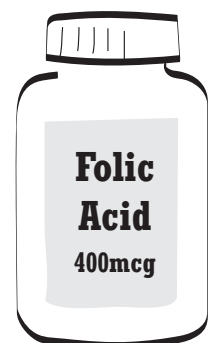
in the U.S. are not planned. That is why it's so important to start taking folic acid each day, even when you are not planning to get pregnant.

Folic acid might also have other benefits for men and women of any age. Some studies show that folic acid might help prevent heart disease, stroke, some cancers, and possibly Alzheimer's disease.

Q: How can women get folic acid?

A: All women should aim to get at least 400 micrograms (400 mcg) of folic acid each day. There are a few easy ways she can do this.

- Take a daily vitamin that has folic acid in it. Most multivitamins sold in the U.S. have enough. Check the label on the vitamin to be sure. It should say "400 mcg" or "100%" next to folic acid. Some labels might use the word "folate" for folic acid. Or you can take a vitamin pill that only has folic acid in it. You can find both of these types at your local grocery, drug store, or discount store.





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- Another way to get enough folic acid is to eat a serving of breakfast cereal that contains 100% of the daily value (DV) for folic acid each day. Check the label on the box to be sure it has enough.

Vitamin Label

Check the label to be sure you are getting enough.

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

Find **folic acid**. Choose a vitamin that says “400mcg” or “100%” next to folic acid.

Eat a healthy diet that contains lots of fruits and vegetables and other foods that have folic acid (or folate) in them or added to them. To the right are foods you can eat to get folic acid (or folate).

foods you can eat to get folic acid (or folate)



broccoli



asparagus



bananas



oranges



peas



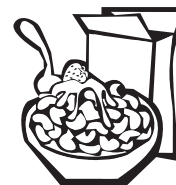
nuts



spaghetti



bread



cereal



flour



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Food Label

Look at the package and the food label to see if the foods have folic acid in them. Find foods that say they have folic acid. The label will tell you how much folic acid is in it. Sometimes, the label will say folate instead of folic acid. It is the same thing.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)			
Servings Per Container 2			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories	250	Calories from Fat 110	
		% Daily Value*	
Total Fat	12g		18%
	Saturated Fat 3g		15%
Cholesterol	30mg		10%
Sodium	470mg		20%
Total Carbohydrate	31g		10%
	Dietary Fiber 0g		0%
	Sugar 5g		
Protein	5g		
Vitamin A			4%
Vitamin C			2%
Calcium			20%
Iron			4%
Folate			30%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

		Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than		65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than		20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than		30mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than		2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrates			300g	375g
Dietary Fiber			25g	30g

Find folic acid (folate). Read across to see how much folic acid is in your food.

Q: How much folic acid should you take?

A: Read the descriptions below to see how much folic acid you should take. Check off the one that applies to you.

- You are able to get pregnant. Take 400 mcg of folic acid every day.
- You are pregnant. Take 600mcg of folic acid every day.
- You are breastfeeding. Take 500mcg of folic acid every day.
- You had a baby with spina bifida or anencephaly and want to get pregnant again. Talk with your doctor, and ask for a prescription for a higher dose of folic acid. You should take 4,000 micrograms (4,000 mcg) starting at least one to three months before getting pregnant and during the first 3 months of pregnancy. That's 10 times the normal amount! But don't try to get the larger amount by taking more than one multivitamin or prenatal vitamin a day. You could get too much of another vitamin that could harm you or your baby.
- You had a baby with spina bifida or anencephaly. You are not planning to have another baby. Take 400 mcg of folic acid every day. ■



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For More Information

You can find out more about folic acid by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 1-800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition

Phone Number(s): (888) 723-3366

Internet Address:

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

Phone Number(s): (888) 663-4637

Internet Address:

<http://www.modimes.org>

National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, CDC, HHS

Phone: (888) 232-5929

Internet Address:

www.cdc.gov/folicacid

Spina Bifida Association of America

Phone Number(s): (800) 621-3141

Internet Address:

<http://www.sbaa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=index>

The folic acid FAQ was reviewed by Christine Prue, PhD, Joe Mulinare, MD, Katie Kilker, BS, CHES, and Patricia Mersereau, MN, CPNP at the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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