



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

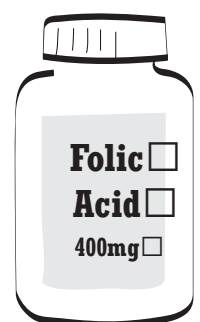
in the U.S. are not planned. That is why it's so important to start taking folic acid each day, even when you are not planning to get pregnant.

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



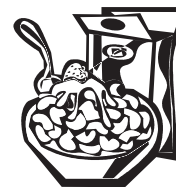
nuts



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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