

Folate

Folate, also known as folic acid, is a B vitamin needed for normal development of new cells, including red blood cells, and normal fetal development and growth. It is also important in decreasing the risk of heart disease and stroke, and may decrease the risk of certain cancers (especially colorectal and cervical).

Pregnancy

Folate helps protect an unborn baby against birth defects that involve the neural tube (which develops into the brain and spinal cord). The neural tube develops during the first few weeks of pregnancy, before most women know they are pregnant. Therefore,

it is recommended that all women of childbearing age take in 400 micrograms (mcg) of folate every day.

Heart disease

Folate, along with vitamins B6 and B12, plays an important role in controlling blood levels of homocysteine. Homocysteine is an amino acid that is a normal product of protein metabolism. However, homocysteine levels can build up in the blood stream when there aren't enough of these B vitamins present. Elevated homocysteine levels lead to plaque buildup along blood vessel walls, increasing risk of heart disease and stroke. Taking 400 micrograms of folate per day decreases this risk.

Finding folate in foods

Food (serving size)	Folate in micrograms (mcg)
Lentils (1/2 cup cooked)	179
Green leafy vegetables (1/2 cup cooked)	120 to 160
Chickpeas (1/2 cup cooked)	141
Kidney beans (1/2 cup cooked)	115
Orange juice (1 cup)	109
Peanuts (1/3 cup roasted)	109
Fortified breakfast cereals	100 to 400
Broccoli (1 cup steamed)	100
Strawberries (1 cup)	80

As of January 1, 1998, folic acid is added to all enriched products, such as white flour, bread, cereals, rolls, grits, cornmeal, farina, rice, pasta and noodles. Eating six servings per day from the above foods supplies you with about 300 micrograms of folic acid.

Food labels

If a food has some folate in it, it will be listed with other vitamins and minerals toward the bottom of the **Nutrition Facts** label. The folate % listed refers to the Recommended Daily Intake (RDI), which is 400 micrograms. The easiest way to use this information is to remember if the level is 20% or more, the food is an excellent source of folate (20% RDI = 80 micrograms folate.)

If you have questions, a nutrition education specialist is available to help at 508-852-6175 or 1-888-392-0183.