

Healthy Eating: Folate¹

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What is folate?

Folate is one of the B vitamins. It is involved in the formation of DNA and amino acids. DNA is the genetic material found in all cells of your body. Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins.



Folate is an important nutrient for everyone. It's especially important for pregnant and nursing women, growing children, and older adults.

Many older people do not get enough folate. This can cause several health problems. Getting enough folate is easier now that many foods are fortified with the vitamin.

Fortified foods: Foods with added nutrients. The form of folate found in fortified foods and dietary supplements is folic acid. Check the Nutrition Facts panel to see which nutrients are listed.

What foods contain folate?

The word folate comes from the same Latin word as foliage, or leaves. Some of



the best food sources for folate are green leafy vegetables, like spinach, collards, and kale. Other foods that are high in folate are oranges and orange juice, legumes (beans and lentils), and peanuts.

Fortified grain foods, like breads and cereals, contain the synthetic form of folate called folic acid.

What happens if I don't get enough folate?

When you don't get enough folate, your body can't make the DNA and amino acids it needs. This is a concern when we are making new body cells during pregnancy and early childhood.

Eating high-folate foods also may reduce your chances of developing:

- s Anemia (reduced number of red blood cells)
- s Heart disease
- s Stroke
- s Cancer
- s Memory problems

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How much folate do I need?

People who are 19 years old and older need 400 micrograms (μg) of folate a day. Pregnant women need an extra 200 μg and nursing moms need an extra 100 μg a day.

To get 400 μg of folate, you can eat foods that are naturally high in folate, as well as foods that are fortified with folic acid. If you aren't getting enough of this vitamin from the foods you eat, you can take a multivitamin that contains folic acid.

How much is 400 micrograms?

"Micro" means small, and 400 micrograms is a very small amount—one teaspoon of sugar weighs about 5 grams, or 5 million micrograms! So you would need about 12,500 times 400 micrograms to fill a teaspoon with sugar.

No wonder folate is called a micronutrient!



There is a separate recommendation for women who are capable of becoming pregnant. Extra folic acid (400 μg daily from fortified foods or supplements) has been shown to prevent some birth defects should a woman become pregnant. This extra folic acid should complement a diet that contains folate-rich foods.



Here are some foods and the amount of folate they contain:

FOOD	FOLATE ($\mu\text{g}/\text{serving}$)
Fortified cereal, 1 serving	100–400
Spinach, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	100
Peanuts, dry roasted $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	80
Kidney beans, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	60
Romaine, 1 cup shredded	75
Orange juice, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (from concentrate)	55
Orange, 1 medium	45
μg = microgram	

Where can I get more information?

A registered dietitian or your local county Extension office may have more written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. In Florida, find your local Extension office at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>.

Call your local Area Agency on Aging for information about meal programs and other services for older adults that may be offered in your area. Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://nutrition.gov>
<http://folicacidinfo.org>
<http://seniors.gov>
<http://mayohealth.org>
<http://aoa.gov>

