What happens if I do not get enough folate?

When you do not get enough folate, your body cannot make the DNA it needs. A lack of folate is especially a concern when the body is making new cells during pregnancy and early childhood. Everyone's body makes new cells every day, so we all need folate in our diets.
Eating folate-rich foods may reduce your chances of developing:

- Anemia
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Memory problems

**How much folate do I need?**

People 19 years old and older need 400 micrograms (mcg) of dietary folate equivalents (DFE) a day. Pregnant women need an extra 200 mcg, and nursing moms need an extra 100 mcg a day.

Eat foods naturally high in folate and foods fortified with folic acid to get 400 mcg of DFEs each day. You can take a multivitamin supplement that contains folic acid if you cannot get enough of this vitamin from the foods you eat. Check the Supplement Facts section of the label to see how much folic acid is in the supplement. One microgram of *folic acid* in a supplement provides 2 mcg of DFE (when you take it on an empty stomach). In contrast, 1 mcg of natural *folate* in foods provides 1 mcg of DFE.

### 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 portions of sugar, each weighing 400 micrograms to fill a teaspoon. No wonder folate is called a micronutrient!

Avoid getting too much folic acid, which can happen if you take supplements and eat a lot of fortified foods. Getting too much folic acid can hide the signs of a vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is also an important vitamin in our diet. People over 50 may be at risk for not getting enough B<sub>12</sub>. For optimal absorption, it is best for people over 50 to get vitamin B<sub>12</sub> from fortified foods or a vitamin supplement. Many breads and cereals are fortified with vitamins, including vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Check the ingredient list and Nutrition Facts panel and select some foods that have added vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Folate (microgram/serving)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereal, 1 serving</td>
<td>200–700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinach, 1/2 cup cooked</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romaine, 1 cup shredded</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney beans, 1/2 cup cooked</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange juice, 3/4 cup</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange, 1 medium</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts, dry roasted 1/2 cup</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Where can I get more information?**

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

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

- [http://folicacidinfo.org](http://folicacidinfo.org)
- [http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Seniors.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Seniors.shtml)
- [http://aoa.gov](http://aoa.gov)