

## **Folic Acid = Good Health and a Healthy Baby**

Folic acid is a B vitamin needed for good health and especially for women if they might become pregnant.

### **Who needs folic acid?**

- 1) **everyone** because folic acid helps prevent anemia
- 2) **women who are not yet pregnant or who are early in their pregnancy** because folic acid can prevent some kinds of birth defects in babies. The defects that can be prevented are spina bifida (a spine that hasn't fully formed) or anencephaly (absence of all of part of the brain or skull).

400 micrograms of folic acid each day are recommended by the National Academy of Sciences (the scientific group that sets nutrient recommendations), the March of Dimes and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The 400 micrograms could come from foods fortified with folic acid and/or supplements along with foods containing folate. When a woman becomes pregnant, she needs 600 micrograms of folic acid found in prenatal vitamins. Taking more than 1,000 micrograms each day could cause nerve damage and is not recommended.

### **Where is folic acid found?**

Natural folic acid (also known as folate) is found in orange juice; leafy green vegetables like spinach; broccoli, pinto, navy and kidney beans; lentils. Fortified breakfast cereals, enriched grain foods like bread, rolls, rice and pasta, enriched flours and cornmeal and multivitamins contain the manmade form of folic acid. The body easily absorbs manmade folic acid. Natural folate found in foods is not absorbed as well. Cooking and storage destroy some of the natural folate in foods.

### **What about folic acid and heart disease?**

Some studies show that folic acid may play a role in preventing heart disease and stroke. High levels of homocysteine, an amino acid from food found in the blood, is linked with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Folic acid decreases the homocysteine levels so scientists think it may prevent heart disease. Studies need to be done to see if this is true. Studies are also looking at folic acid's role in colon cancer.

- 
- References:
1. "Dietary Reference Intakes for Thiamin, Riboflavin, Niacin, Vitamin B6, Folate, Vitamin B12, Pantothenic Acid, Biotin and Choline," [National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine, Food and Nutrition Board, 1999](#)
  2. "Folic Acid Fact Sheet," [March of Dimes](#)

Written By: Ellen Schuster, M.S., R.D.

May 1999

OSU Extension Service

Family and Community Development Program

You may reproduce, but please credit Oregon State University Extension Family and Community Development, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fcd/index.php>