

Total Nutrition

Fabulous Folate Linked to Healthy Heart and Healthy Babies

by Mindy Hermann, RD

(NAPSA)—What does a middle-aged man who is at risk for heart disease have in common with a woman of childbearing age? They both could benefit from having folate



Mindy Hermann

in their daily diet. I had the privilege of talking to some leading authorities to bring you the latest information on fabulous folate.

Folate, also called folic acid, is needed by cells as they grow and divide and the faster a cell grows, the more folate it needs. Red blood cells and the rapidly dividing cells of a growing fetus are among the biggest users of this vitamin. Everybody can benefit from folate. It even helps the body in its recovery from exercise.

The name folic acid refers to the form of this vitamin that is added when foods are fortified. (Think of it this way: we get folate from folic acid and vitamin C from citric acid.)

For pregnant women—A diet with adequate amounts of folate and folic acid can help prevent the most common type of birth defect, which is a neural tube defect like spina bifida or anencephaly.

“Most women don’t even know they are pregnant early on, so getting enough folic acid is essential prior to pregnancy,” says Bob Resta, M.S., a genetic counselor at Swedish Medical Center in Seattle. “Fortified cereals can provide adequate amounts of folic acid, so women should listen to their mothers and avoid skipping breakfast.”

The Institute of Medicine recommends that all women of childbearing age get about 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.

For heart health—High blood levels of a particular amino acid, homocysteine, have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Scientists have discovered that a diet rich in folic acid lowers levels of homocysteine. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that blood homocysteine levels went down in men and women who ate a daily bowl of breakfast cereal (study participants ate Total cereal) that was fortified with folic acid. It has been estimated that lowering blood homocysteine levels by increasing folic acid intake could significantly reduce risk of heart disease, blood clots in veins, and stroke.

Finding folate—A small number of foods—legumes like lentils and kidney beans, orange juice, and spinach and leafy greens—supply folate. Cereals like Whole Grain Total supply enough folic acid to meet 100 percent of the recommended daily intake of 400 micrograms daily for all adults. The Centers for Disease Control has recommended fortified grains and cereals because it is difficult for individuals to absorb the necessary levels of folic acid from naturally occurring sources.

Ask Mindy

Dear Mindy, do I need to eat foods rich in folate if I am taking a pregnancy multivitamin that supplies folic acid?

Lori from Dallas, Texas

Dear Lori, you still should eat folate-rich foods because they contain other beneficial nutrients and compounds available only in foods but not in a supplement.

(Questions for Mindy? E-mail her at askmindy@totalcereal.com)

FOR FOLATE AND FOLIC ACID

FRUITS	Orange Juice	1 cup	109mcg	27%
VEGETABLES & LEGUMES	Cooked Lentils	1/2 cup	179 mcg	45%
	Cooked Asparagus	1/2 cup	121 mcg	30%
	Raw, Chopped Spinach	1 cup	108 mcg	27%
GRAINS & CEREALS	Wheat Germ	1/3 cup	108 mcg	27%
	Wheaties	1 cup	102 mcg	25%



Note to Editors: This is Series IV—14 of 26. It is the inaugural release by dietitian Mindy Hermann, who will author all future series releases. And the format has been redesigned to invoke a stronger connection to your readers and ease in readability, while offering a crisper and more contemporary look.