

Folic Acid and Birth Defects

If you are thinking about having a baby now or in the future, make sure you are taking a multivitamin that contains 0.4 mg of folic acid daily before conception and through the first trimester of pregnancy. Folic acid reduces your risk of having a baby with neural tube defects such as spina bifida. Since about half of the pregnancies in Canada are unplanned, all women of child-bearing age need to take folic acid daily.

Folic acid is in most multivitamins and prenatal vitamin supplements. Check the label to make sure that the supplement has at least 0.4 mg of folic acid.

Keep in mind that you could be pregnant for several weeks before you even realize it. During those early weeks, your baby's vital organs are beginning to form, so taking folic acid is very important.

More About Supplements

Talk to your pharmacist about a supplement with folic acid that will suit your needs. It is not recommended that folic acid be taken in doses higher than 1 mg. per day, without your physician's consent. Also, make sure the multi-vitamin does not contain more than 10,000 I.U. of vitamin A. Too much vitamin A also increases the risk of birth defect.

If you have a personal or a family history of a neural tube defect, have diabetes, or if you are obese, you are at a higher risk of having an affected pregnancy. It is important that you and your partner use a reliable form of birth control. When planning a future pregnancy, you will need a higher dose of folic acid, so it is important to discuss this with your physician or a genetic counsellor before conceiving.

What About Foods?

Folic acid, folate, and folacin all refer to the same B Vitamin required for good health. In addition to folic acid supplements, choose foods that are rich in folate such as dark green leafy vegetables, corn, orange juice, nuts, seeds, wheat germ, broccoli, asparagus, fortified grain products (like flour, pasta, and breakfast cereals), and legumes like split peas, lentils, chick peas, and kidney beans. Eat according to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, taking care to choose these foods daily. The chart on the back of this newsletter lists the amount of folate in various foods.

Unfortunately, folate is easily destroyed. Remember to:

- ✓ Store food in tightly covered containers in the refrigerator.
- ✓ Avoid excessive peeling or cutting of fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ Cook in small amounts of water for as short a time as possible.

Food Sources of Folate

<i>Excellent Source</i> (.055 µg or more)	<i>Good Source</i> (.033 µg or more)	<i>Source</i> (.011 µg or more)
White bread (1 slice)	Corn (½ cup)	Cooked carrots (½ cup)
Rolls, crusty (1)	Bean sprouts (½ cup)	Squash (½ cup)
Enriched pasta (½ cup)	Orange (1)	Cabbage (½ cup)
Cooked legumes (½ cup) eg. kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas	Canned pineapple juice (½ cup)	Strawberries (7)
Cooked spinach (½ cup)	Roasted peanuts (¼ cup)	Banana (1)
Asparagus (6 spears)	Wheat germ (2 tbsp)	Grapefruit (½)
Romaine lettuce (1 cup)	Eggs (2)	Cantaloupe (½ cup)
Orange juice (½ cup)	Avocado (¼)	Cashews (¼ cup)
Sunflower seeds (½ cup)		Walnuts (¼ cup)
		Raspberries (½ cup)
		Honeydew (½ cup)

Tortilla Dip

1 can (398 ml) refried beans
 1/3 c. low fat plain yogurt
 2 chopped green onions
 1 clove garlic, minced
 1 tsp. cumin
 1 tsp. chili powder
 2 tbsp. salsa
 2 tbsp. chopped fresh coriander or parsley

Combine beans, yogurt, onions, garlic, cumin and chili powder in a bowl; mix well. Cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Just before serving, spread with salsa and sprinkle with coriander or parsley. Serve with raw veggies, baked tortilla chips, or pita bread. Makes 2 cups.

Orange Julep

4 c. unsweetened orange juice
 1/3 c. vanilla yogurt
 6 ice cubes

Put all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth and frothy. Serves 6.