

On-Line Resources

National Center for Birth Defects and Development Disabilities:

800-232-4636

<http://www.cdc.gov/folicacid>

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

914-997-4488

<http://www.marchofdimes.com>

Birth Defects Research For Children, Inc

407-566-8304

<http://www.birthdefects.org>



Edited by Genea Luck, Congregational Health Partnership.

Articles in this newsletter are not a substitute for the care and advice of medical professionals. When you have a question or need medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, consult your physician.

This newsletter is produced by Inova Health System in conjunction with your faith community. If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, please notify the appropriate personnel in your faith community.

Inova Health System is a not-for-profit healthcare system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services, including emergency- and urgent-care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health and blood donor services, and wellness classes.

Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community it serves through excellence in patient care, education and research. Inova provides a healthy environment for its patients, families, visitors, staff and physicians by prohibiting tobacco use on its campuses.

**Congregational Health
Partnership**

2700 Prosperity Ave

Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 703-698-2558

Fax: 703-698-2579

www.inova.org/chp



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Community
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For Your Health

The Benefits of Folic Acid

Folic acid, also known as folate and B9, is one of the B vitamins and it is necessary for the production of red blood cells and normal metabolism.

The benefits of folic acid may not be limited to women of child-bearing age.

Although there is still more research needed, folic acid has also been associated with a reduced risk for heart disease, stroke, some forms of cancer and Alzheimer's.

Two thirds of women in the United States do not get enough folic acid in their diet.

It is a very important vitamin for pregnant women or women who are interested in becoming pregnant, as it can prevent the occurrence of birth defects and prevents infant spinal cord defects such as Spina Bilfida.



Folic Acid and Birth Defects

Folic acid is needed even *before* a woman becomes pregnant. The neural tube which becomes the spinal cord, spine, brain and skull forms in a growing baby during the first few weeks after conception. If a pregnant woman does not have enough folic acid already in her body before this development begins, the baby growing in the womb may end up with a neural tube defect called anencephaly (pronounced an-en-sef-uh-lee)

Neural tube defects cause serious problems in the spine or brain ranging from learning disabilities to paralysis and even death of the baby.

Where to Find Folic Acid

Folic acid (folate) is easy to find.

It can be found naturally in fruits, green, leafy vegetables and dried beans and peas. Some foods have been fortified (meaning folic acid has been added to the food).

Certain flours, grain products (rice, pasta) and cereals have folate added. You can look at the food label to see if folate is listed as one of the ingredients.

You can also take a supplement – either a single folic acid pill or a multivitamin. Folic acid is most effective when you eat a diet rich in the vitamin and also take a supplement.



Too Much Folic Acid?

There is no known toxic level in taking folic acid.

The recommended daily amount is 400 micrograms (mcg) or 0.4 milligrams (mg).

Folic acid can have some serious side effects if too much is taken every day. Dangerous levels of consumption are between 5,000 to 15,000 mcg.

With some excessive doses (15 mcg or higher) excessive folic acid may seriously affect the digestive system.

Most women who take folic acid have no side effects, but in some women who have taken too much have skin flushing, rash and itching.

As with all vitamins and supplements, you should monitor the amount that is taken and the foods you eat as taking too much folic acid as a supplement can hide serious deficiency symptoms of vitamin B12 (anemia).

Lacking vitamin B12 is rare among women of childbearing age, and most prenatal vitamins also contain B12 to help women get the amount that they need.

Many people 50 years and older are at an increased risk of not having enough B12. If you are 50 and older, be sure to talk to your doctor about the benefits of taking certain vitamin supplements.