

# Folic acid (Folate)

## *In this fact sheet*

How to get more folate

Folate in food

For more information

Remember, the information on this fact sheet should not be used or relied on as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see your health care professional.

Folate is a B group vitamin that can lower your chance of having a baby born with spina bifida or other neural tube defects. Folic acid is changed into folate in the body.

Women who are planning a pregnancy need to take extra folic acid for at least one month before pregnancy, and for the first three months of the pregnancy.

## **How to get more folate**

The easiest and most effective way to raise folate levels is by taking a folic acid tablet containing 0.5 milligrams (mg) of folic acid every day.

- **Folic acid is very safe.**
- Folic acid tablets are available from chemists, health food shops and supermarkets.
- You do not need a prescription to buy them and they are not expensive.
- Multivitamin tablets often contain folic acid, but not as much as is needed.

Some women need to take more folic acid than the usual recommended amount if they have:

- Previously had a baby with a neural tube defect
- A close relative who has had a neural tube defect
- Spina bifida
- Are on some types of medication

Check with your doctor who will advise you on the amount to take.

Each year there are about 20 babies in South Australia with spina bifida. By taking folate (folic acid) you can reduce the chance of having a baby with a neural tube defect by up to 70 per cent.

## **Folate in food**

Folate occurs naturally in many foods, but it is very difficult to get all of the folate you need to prevent neural tube defects through your diet.

The foods that have the most folate include:

- Asparagus
- Avocado
- Bran flakes
- Brussels sprouts
- Cooked dried chick peas
- Cooked dried soy beans
- Endive lettuce
- Spinach
- Vegemite

You will also find that many types of bread, breakfast cereals and other packaged foods contain added folate. These are called folate-fortified foods.

Heating can destroy folate. If you are cooking any folate-rich vegetables it is best to microwave, stir-fry or steam them. Do not use any bicarbonate of soda when you are cooking folate-rich foods such as dried chickpeas or soybeans.

## **For more information**

Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association in your state or territory

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) 'Folic acid and pregnancy'  
[http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/\\_srcfiles/FSANZ%20Folic%20Acid.pdf](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/FSANZ%20Folic%20Acid.pdf)

**The information contained in, or accessed through, this Website is for your general information and use only and is not intended to be used as medical advice and should not be used to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any medical condition, nor should it be used for therapeutic purposes. The information is not a substitute for independent professional advice and should not be used as an alternative to professional health care. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.**

The content of this fact sheet was provided by the South Australian Government's Children, Youth and Women's Health Service. The South Australian Government does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of this reproduction.



An Australian Government Initiative

For more information on this topic or any issues related to pregnancy, birth or babies, call the free 24 hour helpline:

**1800 882 436**

