

Folate and Your Health

What is folate?

Folate is one of the B vitamins found naturally in foods. *Folic acid* is the form of folate found in vitamin supplements and added to fortified foods.

Why is folate important for my health?

Folate helps make normal red and white blood cells. If you do not get enough folate, you may develop anemia. As a result, you may feel tired or weak, or you may not be able to concentrate.

In addition, folate is needed when the body makes new genetic material (DNA), such as during pregnancy. If you are a woman planning a pregnancy, folate is important because it helps prevent some birth defects. For more information, see BC HealthFile [#38c Pregnancy and Nutrition: Spina Bifida and Folic Acid](#).

How much folate do I need each day?

Adults need 400 micrograms (mcg) of dietary folate equivalents (DFEs)* each day. It is important to eat foods that contain folate every day. Taking a daily multivitamin can help you get the folate you need.

* There is a difference in how well natural food folate is absorbed as compared with folic acid that is in supplements or added to fortified food. Dietary Folate Equivalents (DFEs) adjust for these differences. 1 mcg of DFE = 1 mcg of food folate, and = 0.6 mcg of folic acid from fortified food or as a supplement taken with meals, and = 0.5 mcg of a supplement taken on an empty stomach.

Do some people need more folate?

Women of childbearing age between 14 and 50 years, whether planning a pregnancy or not, need a multivitamin with 400 mcg (0.4 mg) of folic acid each day, in addition to eating foods high in folate.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women need more folate. The recommended amount of folate is 600 mcg for pregnant women and 500 mcg for breastfeeding women. To get enough folate, pregnant and breastfeeding women should continue taking a daily supplement with folic acid.

Do not take more than 1 milligram each day unless advised by your doctor.

Which foods are good sources of folate?

Good sources of folate include dried peas, beans, and lentils, dark green leafy vegetables, other vegetables and fruits, enriched grain products, and nuts and seeds.

For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at www.bchealthguide.org

Food Sources of Folate

Food	Portion	Folate (mcg DFE)
Liver, chicken, cooked	75 g or 2 1/2 oz	420
Cranberry, lentils, or black eyed peas, cooked*	175 mL or 3/4 cup	266
Pinto beans or garbanzo beans (chick peas), cooked*	175 mL or 3/4 cup	214
Liver, beef, cooked	75 g or 2 1/2 oz	195
Black beans, navy beans or dark red kidney beans, cooked*	175 mL or 3/4 cup	183
Spinach, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 cup	139
Asparagus, cooked	6 spears	134
White beans, canned	175 mL or 3/4 cup	126
Liver, pork, cooked	75 g or 2 1/2 oz	122
Soybeans, green, boiled	125 mL or 1/2 cup	106
Wheat germ, toasted	30 g or 2 Tbsp	106
Pasta, enriched	125 mL or 1/2 cup	92
Split peas or home-prepared baked beans, cooked*	175 mL or 3/4 cup	92
Broccoli, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 cup	89
Sunflower seed kernels, dried	60 mL or 1/4cup	83
Avocado	1/2 fruit	81
Romaine lettuce, raw	250 mL or 1 cup	80
Beets, boiled	125 mL or 1/2 cup	72
Soybeans, cooked	175 mL or 3/4 cup	69
Eggs	2 large	65
Spinach, raw	250 mL or 1 cup	61
White bread	35 g or 1 slice	60
Orange juice, from frozen concentrate	125 mL or 1/2 cup	58
Peanuts, roasted	60 mL or 1/4 cup	54
Brussels sprouts, cooked	4 sprouts	50
Green peas, frozen, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 cup	50
Gai-lan (Chinese broccoli) or parsnips, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 cup	47
Bok choy or corn, fresh, frozen, canned, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 cup	39
Orange juice, fresh	125 mL or 1/2 cup	39
Orange	1 medium	39
Hazelnuts or cashews	60 mL or 1/4 cup	29
Cold breakfast cereals	30 g	36 (check label)
Broccoli, raw or cauliflower, raw or cooked	125 mL or 1/2 cup	30
Peanut butter, all types	30 g or 2 Tbsp	27
Tomato juice or vegetable juice cocktail, canned	125 mL or 1/2 cup	27

*Canned beans in general are lower in folate content than cooked beans.

**For nutrition information, call Dial-A-Dietitian
and speak to a registered dietitian
at 604-732-9191 in Greater Vancouver or
1-800-667-3438 toll-free in BC.**

