



Folate and your health

What is folate?

Folate is a B vitamin found naturally in many foods.

What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a form of folate. It's used in vitamin supplements and fortified foods. Fortified foods, also called enriched foods, are foods that have specific nutrients added to them.

What is a Dietary Folate Equivalent (DFE)?

A DFE is a unit to measure folate. Folate and folic acid are absorbed differently. The DFE accounts for these differences. It tells you how much folate you get from the foods you eat.

Why is folate important for my health?

Folate helps make red and white blood cells. If you do not get enough folate, you could get anemia (an-ee-me-yah). People who have anemia feel tired or weak and may have a racing heartbeat and trouble catching their breath.

Folate is also needed for growth, especially in unborn babies. Folate helps prevent neural tube defects (NTDs). NTDs are a group of serious birth defects that affect a baby's spinal cord, brain and skull. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #38c Pregnancy and nutrition: Folate and neural tube defects](#).

Which foods are good sources of folate?

Good sources of folate include:

- dried peas, beans, and lentils
- dark green vegetables
- enriched grain products

How much folate do I need each day?

Age (years)	Micrograms (mcg) dietary folate equivalents (DFE)
0 to 6 months	65
7 to 12 months	80
1 to 3	150
4 to 8	200
9 to 13	300
14 and older	400
Pregnancy	600
Breastfeeding	500

Adults need 400 micrograms (mcg) or 0.4 milligrams (mg) of folate each day. You can usually get enough by eating a variety of healthy foods.

Do some people need a supplement?

Yes. If you could become pregnant, are pregnant or are breastfeeding, take a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid every day and eat foods that are high in folate. This helps prevent neural tube defects that form in the first few weeks of pregnancy, often before a woman knows she is pregnant.

Do not take more than 1000 mcg (1 mg) of folic acid from fortified foods and supplements each day unless your health care provider has told you to. Too much folic acid can cause health problems.

For more nutrition information, call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian.

Food sources of folate

Food	Serving Size	Amount of Folate (mcg DFE)
Beans, Peas, Lentils, Nuts, Seeds		
Black beans, dried, cooked *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	190
Chickpeas (garbanzo beans), dried, cooked *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	209
Chickpeas (garbanzo beans), canned, drained *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	59
Hazelnuts or cashews	60 mL (1/4 cup)	25
Kidney beans, dried, cooked *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	170
Kidney beans, canned, drained *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	33
Lentils, dried, cooked	175 mL (3/4 cup)	265
Peanut butter, natural	30 mL (2 Tbsp)	46
Peanuts, roasted	60 mL (1/4 cup)	36
Pinto beans, dried, cooked *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	218
Pinto beans, canned, drained *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	30
Soybeans, green (edamame), cooked and shelled	125 mL (1/2 cup)	106
Split peas, dried, cooked *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	94
Sunflower seeds, dried, shelled	60 mL (1/4 cup)	81
White beans, dried, cooked *	175 mL (3/4 cup)	181
Vegetables and Fruits		
Asparagus, cooked	6 spears	134
Avocado	1/2 fruit	81
Beets, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	72
Bok Choy, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	37
Broccoli, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	89
Broccoli, raw or cauliflower, raw or cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	30
Brussels sprouts, cooked	4 sprouts	50
Gai-lan (Chinese broccoli) or parsnips, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	47
Green peas, frozen, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	50
Kale, raw	250 mL (1 cup)	100
Orange	1 medium	39
Papaya	1/2 fruit	56
Romaine lettuce, raw	250 mL (1 cup)	80
Spinach, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	139
Spinach, raw	250 mL (1 cup)	61
Enriched Grain Products ***		
Cold breakfast cereals	30 g	33-59
Pasta, enriched, cooked	125 mL (1/2 cup)	100
White bread	35 g (1 slice)	64
Other		
Eggs, cooked	2 large	54
Liver, beef, cooked **	75 g (2 1/2 oz)	195
Liver, chicken, cooked **	75 g (2 1/2 oz)	420
Liver, pork, cooked **	75 g (2 1/2 oz)	122
Wheat germ, toasted	30 mL (2 Tbsp)	50

g = gram, mcg = micrograms, mL = millilitre, oz = ounce, Tbsp = tablespoon

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.

* Canned beans usually have less folate than dried beans due to processing effects such as leaching.

** Liver and liver products (e.g. liverwurst spread and liver sausages) are very high in vitamin A. Too much vitamin A may cause birth defects, especially during the first trimester. The safest choice is to limit these foods during pregnancy. If you choose to eat liver or liver products, have no more than 75g (2 ½ ounces) per week.

*** The amount of folic acid in enriched foods varies. Check the nutrition label for more information. By 2022, labels of enriched foods will list the amount of folate in micrograms (mcg) DFE. Until then, some labels will only list folate as a percent daily value (%DV). In this case, the standard used is 220mcg. For example, if a serving of cereal has 17% DV, it has 37mcg of folic acid ($0.17 \times 220\text{mcg} = 37\text{mcg}$).

Note: The values in the above table come from the Canadian Nutrient File (CNF). If more than one entry for that food item was available in the CNF, an average of the entries was taken.