



# Folate and Your Health

## What is folate?

Folate is a B vitamin found naturally in foods.

## What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a form of folate. You can find it in vitamin supplements and fortified foods. Fortified foods, also called enriched foods, are foods that have had specific nutrients added to them.

## Why is folate important for my health?

Everyone needs some folate in their bodies. Folate helps make red and white blood cells. If you do not get enough folate, you could get a blood condition called anemia (an-ee-me-yah). People who have anemia feel tired or weak and have trouble focusing or concentrating.

Folate is also needed for growth, especially in developing babies. Folate helps prevent some birth defects, such as defects of the brain and spinal cord. Brain or spinal cord defects are called neural tube defects (NTDs). For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #38c Pregnancy and Nutrition: Folate and Neural Tube Defects](#).

## How much folate do I need each day?

Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for Folate (Daily)		
Age (years)	Men	Women
0 to 6 months	65 mcg	65 mcg
7 to 12 months	80 mcg	80 mcg
1 to 3	150 mcg	150 mcg
4 to 8	200 mcg	200 mcg
9 to 13	300 mcg	300 mcg
14 and older	400 mcg	400 mcg

mcg = micrograms

Adults need 400 micrograms (mcg) of folate each day. 400 micrograms (mcg) = 0.4 milligrams (mg). You can

usually get enough folate every day by choosing foods that are good sources of folate. If you are not sure you are getting enough folate from food, you can take a multivitamin each day.

## Do some people need more folate?

Yes. Women who could become pregnant, are pregnant or breastfeeding need more folate.

All women who could become pregnant need to eat foods that are high in folate and take a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid every day.

Pregnant women need at least 600 mcg of folate each day from foods and supplements. The brain and spine of the unborn baby form in the first 4 weeks of the pregnancy (the first or second week after the first missed period). Taking a folic acid supplement each day helps reduce the chance of a neural tube defect in their developing child.

Breastfeeding women need at least 500 mcg of folate each day from food and supplements.

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

## Which foods are good sources of folate?

Good sources of folate include:

- peas, beans, and lentils (cooked, not canned);
- dark green leafy vegetables;
- other vegetables and fruits; and
- enriched grain products.

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

## Food Sources of Folate

Food	Portion	Folate (mcg)	Notes (see below)
Asparagus, cooked	6 spears	134	
Avocado	1/2 fruit	81	
Beets, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	72	
Black beans, navy beans or dark red kidney beans, cooked	175 mL or 3/4 c	183	①
Bok Choy, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	37	
Broccoli, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	89	
Broccoli, raw or cauliflower, raw or cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	30	
Brussels sprouts, cooked	4 sprouts	50	
Cold breakfast cereals	30 g	21-36	③
Cranberry beans, lentils, or black eyed peas, cooked	175 mL or 3/4 c	267	①
Eggs, cooked	2 large eggs	54	
Gai-lan (Chinese broccoli) or parsnips, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	47	
Green peas, frozen, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	50	
Hazelnuts or cashews	60 mL or 1/4 c	25	
Liver, beef, cooked	75 g or 2 1/2 oz	193	②
Liver, chicken, cooked	75 g or 2 1/2 oz	420	②
Liver, pork, cooked	75 g or 2 1/2 oz	122	②
Orange juice, fresh	125 mL or 1/2 c	39	
Orange juice, from frozen concentrate	125 mL or 1/2 c	25	
Orange	1 medium	39	
Papaya	1/2 fruit	56	
Pasta, enriched, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	62	③
Peanut butter, natural	30 mL or 2 Tbsp	46	
Peanuts, roasted	60 mL or 1/4 c	36	
Romaine lettuce, raw	250 mL or 1 c	80	
Pinto beans or garbanzo beans (chickpeas), cooked	175 mL or 3/4 c	214	①
Soybeans, cooked	175 mL or 3/4 c	69	①
Soybeans, green/edamame, cooked and shelled	125 mL or 1/2 c	106	
Spinach, cooked	125 mL or 1/2 c	139	
Spinach, raw	250 mL or 1 c	61	
Split peas or home-prepared baked beans, cooked	175 mL or 3/4 c	92	①
Sunflower seed kernels, dried	60 mL or 1/4 c	81	
Tomato juice or vegetable juice cocktail, canned	125 mL or 1/2 c	27	
Wheat germ, toasted	30 mL or 2 Tbsp	50	
White beans, canned	175 mL or 3/4 c	181	①
White bread	35 g or 1 slice	39	③

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

- ① Canned beans usually have less folate than cooked beans.
- ② 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.

- ③ The amount of folic acid in enriched foods varies. Check the label for accurate information. If the amount is given as a percentage of the daily value (DV), the standard used is 220 mcg. For example, if a serving of cereal has 17% of the daily value, it has 37 mcg of folic acid (0.17 x 220 mcg = 37 mcg).