



# NCDCA Newsletter

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## Happy New Year 2010!

I hope everyone had a safe and Happy New Year! January is Birth Defect Prevention Awareness Month and Folic Acid Awareness Week is January 3rd-9th. In honor of this our newsletter will focus on these two topics. We have two wonderful articles written by Dietetic students from the University of Northern Colorado to remind us of the importance of folic acid and give an update on birth defect prevention.

Next month we will feature articles for American Heart Month. As always if anyone has any suggestions or comments please contact Desiree at [desrichardson316@yahoo.com](mailto:desrichardson316@yahoo.com)

Have a great year!

Desiree

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*January 6th is Bean Day and January 26th  
is Salt Awareness Day*

## FAQ's about Folic Acid

*By Laura Newman*

If you – or someone you care about – are a female of childbearing age, take note. Folic acid, one of the B vitamins, is one of the most important nutrients for you. Folic acid can help prevent birth defects of the spine and brain. While an increasing number of foods and supplements are being fortified with higher levels of folic acid than ever before, many women are still not getting enough. Here is what you need to know about folic acid.

## What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a man-made form of folate, one of the B vitamins. Folic acid helps your body make new cells and helps keep your blood healthy. Not getting enough folic acid can cause anemia (even in women who are not pregnant) as well as birth defects in developing babies. These birth defects include:

- **Spina bifida** – a disorder of the spine marked by the incomplete closure of the neural tube. This generally results in leg paralysis and other lifelong disabilities.
- **Anencephaly** – a condition in which all or most of the brain does not develop. Babies with anencephaly die before or shortly after birth.

Adequate levels of folic acid before and during pregnancy ensure the neural tube, spinal cord, and brain develop normally. Folic acid can reduce the risk for these birth defects by 50-70%. In addition, it appears that folic acid may also help prevent certain cancers, Alzheimer's disease, and age-related hearing loss – though more research is needed to establish a firm correlation.

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## How much folic acid do I need?

Women who are physically able to become pregnant should take in 400-800 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid daily. Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, and folic acid is most crucial during the first few weeks of pregnancy – even before most women know they are pregnant. Therefore, even if you are not planning to become pregnant, it is still important to take enough folic acid to prevent birth defects – after all, it's far better to be safe than sorry. In addition, as noted above, folic acid has beneficial effects even for women who are not pregnant.

If you are breastfeeding, you still need to take in a slightly higher level of folic acid – at least 500 mcg. Check with your doctor if you fall into any of the following categories, as you may need a higher dosage of folic acid if you:



- Have had a baby with spina bifida or anencephaly and want to become pregnant again
- Have a family member with spina bifida
- Have spina bifida and wish to get pregnant
- Are taking medication for epilepsy, type 2 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, or psoriasis, inflammatory bowel disease, as some medicines may affect the absorption of folic acid
- Have kidney disease and are on dialysis
- Have liver disease or celiac disease
- Abuse alcohol or other drugs

## How can I get enough folic acid?

Thankfully, it is not extremely difficult to take in enough folic acid. Folic acid is being added to an increasing number of foods, and is also found in most multivitamin and mineral supplements. Most multivitamins have at least 400 mcg of folic acid. Folic acid-only supplements are also available if you do not wish to take a multivitamin. Prenatal vitamins also contain adequate levels of folic acid. Many doctors recommend women who are planning to become pregnant take either a prenatal or multivitamin with at least 400 mcg of folic acid daily.

If you would rather get folate (the natural form of folic acid) from food directly, be sure to regularly include the following good sources of folate into your diet:

- Beans and lentils
- Soymilk
- Peas
- Orange, tomato, grapefruit, and pineapple juices
- Fruits such as oranges, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, papaya, and raspberries
- Vegetables such as green leafy veggies, avocado, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, asparagus, artichokes, okra, corn, cauliflower, potato, beets, green onions, and red peppers
- Nuts
- Sunflower seeds
- Peanuts and peanut butter
- Liver



Folic acid is also added to many foods (often labeled as “fortified”), such as:

- Breakfast cereal
- Bread
- Flour
- Pasta
- Cornmeal
- White rice

When in doubt, be sure to always check the nutrition facts on the food label to ensure that a food has at least 100% of the daily value (DV) of folic acid (or at least 400 mcg).

### **Is it possible to get too much of a good thing?**

It is highly unlikely that you will take in too much folate from foods that naturally contain folate. However, since so many foods are now fortified with high levels of folic acid and many people also take a multivitamin, folic acid supplement, or prenatal vitamin, it is possible to take in too much folic acid. Taking in more than 1000 mcg of folic acid a day can be problematic for people who have low vitamin B12 levels. Luckily, most healthy adults generally have healthy vitamin B12 levels. However, vegans (those who do not eat meat, eggs, or dairy products) and people over age 50 are at risk for having low vitamin B12 levels. Check with your doctor if you believe you may be at risk for low vitamin B12 levels before taking in large quantities of folic acid.

### **Sources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Facts about folic acid.” [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
 Office on Women’s Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. “Folate (Folic Acid).”  
[Womenshealth.gov](http://Womenshealth.gov)

# Prevention of Birth Defects with Folic Acid

By Nicole Natal

Folic Acid Awareness Week is being celebrated this January from the 4-10<sup>th</sup> and what better time than now to learn the importance of folic acid and how the vitamin plays a critical role in preventing some forms of birth defects by up to 50-70%.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a staggering one in 33 babies born in the United States is affected by birth defects. Birth defects make this the leading cause of all infant deaths by 20%. The most common of these is a neural tube defect called Spina Bifida. This occurs when the neural tube of an embryo does not form completely, exposing the brain and/or spinal cord. Unfortunately, Spina Bifida occurs in the third or fourth week of pregnancy before most women know they are pregnant. The solution to this problem may seem simple and lies behind two words: Folic Acid.

Folic Acid is a water soluble B-vitamin. It is essential and needed by our bodies to build DNA for proper cell growth. Folic Acid (the synthetic form of naturally occurring Folate) is easily absorbed and can be found in fortified foods such as pasta, bread, grains, and breakfast cereal, or in a multivitamin. Folate can be found in orange juice, leafy green vegetables, beans, and in certain fruits.

Given the fact that fifty percent of pregnancies in the U.S are not planned, it would be advised to include folic acid in an everyday diet. The CDC recommends women take 400 mcg of folic acid every day a month *before* pregnancy as well as through the first trimester. This can best be achieved by taking a multivitamin since one's diet is often times an inadequate source of complete vitamins that the body requires.

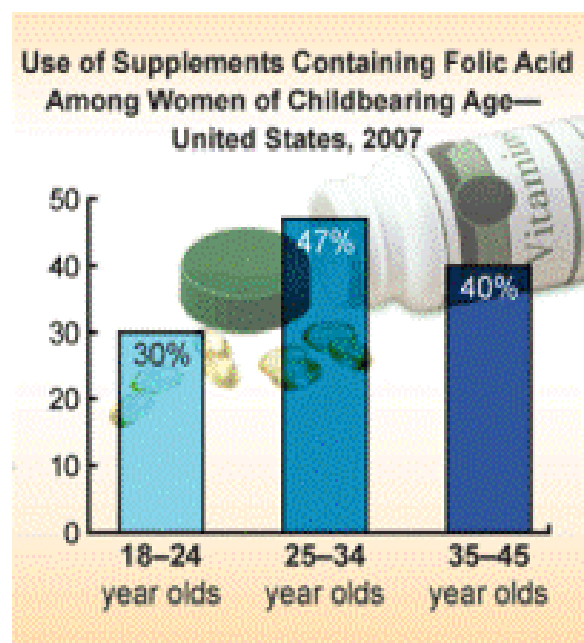
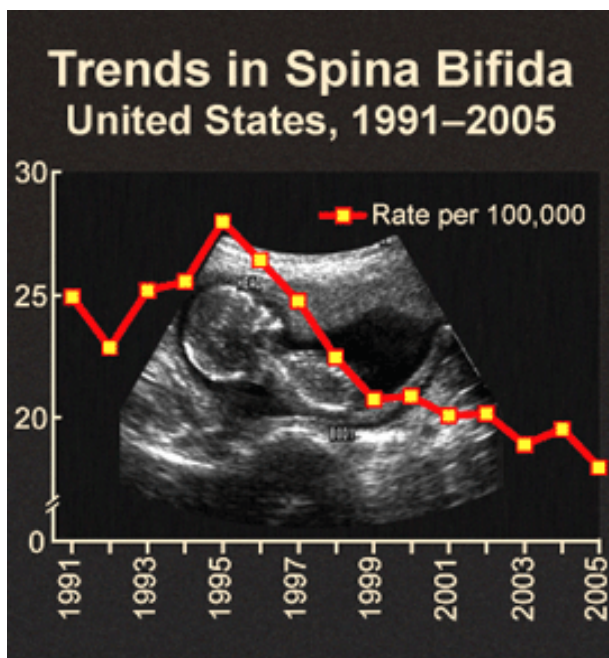
Men, don't be mislead; folic acid is important for everyone-not just the women. In fact, studies have shown that folic acid decreases the risk cardiovascular diseases, cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and Dementia, certain cancers, and depression, to name a few.

## Sources

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/bd/>

<http://www.folicacidinfo.org/index.php>

For more information about Folic Acid and birth defects, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/data.html>.



## Mixed Bean Salad with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

1 (8-ounce) jar oil-packed sun-dried tomato halves  
 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley  
 1/2 cup chopped fresh basil  
 1 (15-ounce) can red kidney beans, rinsed and drained  
 1 (15-ounce) can white kidney beans, rinsed and drained  
 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained  
 1 (15.8-ounce) can black-eyed peas, rinsed and drained  
 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced  
 1/3 cup red wine vinegar  
 1/4 cup sugar  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard  
 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper



Drain sun-dried tomatoes in a sieve over a bowl, reserving oil. Place 1/4 cup reserved oil in a medium bowl. Return the remaining oil to sun-dried tomato jar; reserve for another use. Chop drained tomatoes; place in a large bowl. Add parsley and next 6 ingredients (through onion) to chopped tomatoes, and stir gently to combine.

Add vinegar and remaining ingredients to 1/4 cup reserved oil, stirring with a whisk. Drizzle over bean mixture; toss gently to coat. Cover and chill.

**Yield: 14 servings (serving size: 1/2 cup)**

CALORIES 181 (28% from fat); FAT 5.7g (sat 0.7g, mono 3.6g, poly 0.9g); IRON 2.5mg; CHOLESTEROL 0.0mg; CALCIUM 100mg; CARBOHYDRATE 26.2g; SODIUM 500mg; PROTEIN 7.2g; FIBER 4.4g

### *Next NCDA Meeting*



Our NCDA Annual Awards Dinner will be January 19<sup>th</sup> at Chimney Park Restaurant & Bar. The address is 406 Main Street Windsor, CO. Please join us for "Enjoying the Delicious Power of Nutrient-Rich Foods: A positive new approach for achieving better health" by Julie Moore, MS, RD – Colorado Beef Council and Jenna Allen, MS, RD – Dairy Council