

Folate/Folic Acid

What Are Folate and Folic Acid?

Folate and folic acid are two forms of the same vitamin:

- **Folate** is the vitamin found naturally in food.
- **Folic acid** is the form of the vitamin that is added to foods such as cereal and flour. Your body absorbs folic acid better than folate.

What Do Folate and Folic Acid Do?

Your body needs this vitamin to build new cells. It is important for the nervous system, which includes the brain and spinal cord. The vitamin also helps limit homocysteine levels, which may protect against heart disease and cancer.

Women need folate before and during pregnancy to protect their babies from birth defects, such as:

- Spina bifida (the incomplete development of the spinal cord or its coverings)
- Anencephaly (a defect in the closure of the neural tube during fetal development)
- Certain heart problems
- Cleft lip or cleft palate

How Much Folate/Folic Acid Do You Need?

- Most healthy teens (ages 14 years and older) and adults need 400 micrograms (mcg) of folate per day.
- Pregnant women need 600 mcg per day.
- Nursing women need 500 mcg per day.
- Some medications can interfere with your body's ability to use folate/folic acid (see sidebar). If you take these medicines, you may need more folate/folic acid. Check with your doctor or dietitian before taking folic acid supplements.

How Much Folic Acid Is Too Much?

- Teens between the ages of 14 and 18 years should not have more than 800 mcg folic acid per day.
- The safety limit for adults ages 19 years or older is 1,000 mcg per day.

Medications That May Interfere with Folic Acid

- Antacids
- Anticonvulsants
- Aspirin
- Methotrexate
- Oral contraceptives
- Pyrimethamine
- Sulfasalazine
- Trimethoprim
- Trimetrexate



Tips for Getting Enough Folate/Folic Acid

- Plan two or more meals per week with beans as the main protein.
- Eat a dark green vegetable on most days.
- Include one food from the grains group at each meal.
- Choose folate-rich foods for snacks.
- Instead of a soft drink, choose orange juice.

Which Foods Have Folate/Folic Acid?

Food	Serving Size	Folate/Folic Acid (mcg)
Cereal, ready-to-eat	1 cup	Usually 100–400
Cereal, cooked (oatmeal, farina, grits)	1 cup	Usually 75–300
Turkey giblets, cooked	1 cup	486
Lentils or black-eyed peas, cooked	1 cup	358
Pinto beans, cooked	1 cup	294
Chickpeas (garbanzo beans), cooked	1 cup	282
Okra, frozen, cooked	1 cup	269
Spinach, cooked	1 cup	263
Black beans, cooked	1 cup	256
Enriched long-grain white rice, cooked	1 cup	238
Beef liver, cooked	3 oz	221
Enriched egg noodles, cooked	1 cup	221
Spinach, canned	1 cup	210
Collards, cooked	1 cup	177
Turnip greens, cooked	1 cup	170
Broccoli, cooked	1 cup	168
Enriched spaghetti, cooked	1 cup	167
Brussels sprouts, cooked	1 cup	157
Artichokes, cooked	1 cup	150
Beets, cooked	1 cup	136
Peas, cooked	1 cup	127
Papayas	1 whole papaya	116
Cream-style corn, canned	1 cup	115
Orange juice	1 cup	110