



IS IT GOING TO BE COMPULSORY (MANDATORY) TO ADD FOLIC ACID TO THE FOOD SUPPLY?

Because not all pregnancies are planned and it is difficult to get enough folate from eating food, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is finalising consideration of a food standard in 2006 for the mandatory fortification of food with folic acid to reduce the risk of neural tube defects. Although fortification is currently allowed, it is voluntary and the range of foods fortified with folic acid is limited. The intent of mandatory fortification is to add folic acid to a whole group of commonly eaten foods, such as all bread.

This important public health project will include intensive consultation with public health professionals, the food industry and the state and territory health and food authorities. The new standard will balance the need for pregnant women to get sufficient folic acid while ensuring that some segments of the population, such as small children, do not get too much. A final decision on which food the folic acid will be added to has not been made. Possibilities include bread in the first instance, although other foods may be considered in the future.



OTHER FSANZ ADVICE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Listeria and food – advice for people at risk. See the FSANZ website <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/me diareleasespublications/factsheets/factsheets2005/listeriacommonlyaske3115.cfm>

Mercury in fish – advice on fish consumption. See the FSANZ website <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/whatsinfood/mercuryinfood.cfm>

ABOUT FOOD STANDARDS AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is an independent statutory agency established by the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*. We work within an integrated food regulatory system involving the governments of Australia and the New Zealand Government. FSANZ sets food standards for the two countries.

Our main objectives are:

- the protection of public health and safety;
- the provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices; and
- the prevention of misleading and deceptive conduct.

We also have a responsibility to help stimulate and support growth and innovation in the food industry and to ensure that food regulatory measures are consistent with international obligations.

So we can achieve broad community support for our work and public confidence in our regulatory decisions, we maintain collaborative arrangements with our government partners and with primary producers and processors, manufacturers, retailers, consumer organisations, public health bodies and other stakeholder groups.

YOU CAN ORDER MORE COPIES OF THIS BROCHURE FROM

For hard copies please contact FSANZ on +61 2 6271 2241 or info@foodstandards.gov.au

Folic Acid & Pregnancy



WHAT IS FOLATE/FOLIC ACID?

Folic acid is a B group vitamin that is needed for healthy growth and development. This vitamin is known as **folate** when it is found naturally in food, such as green leafy vegetables, and as **folic acid** when it is added to food, such as bread and breakfast cereals, or used in dietary supplements.

WHO NEEDS FOLIC ACID AND WHY?

Folic acid is important for everyone but is especially important for women of childbearing age particularly those planning a pregnancy.

This vitamin is crucial to the healthy development of babies in early pregnancy. A baby's growth is the most rapid in the first weeks of life – often before you even know you are pregnant. Folic acid taken at least one month before pregnancy and for the first three months of pregnancy will substantially reduce the risk of birth abnormalities called neural tube defects (NTD) in babies. The most common form of a neural tube defect is spina bifida.

HOW MUCH FOLIC ACID DO I NEED?

To reduce the risk of neural tube defects, all women planning a pregnancy, or capable of becoming pregnant, need to take an additional 0.4 milligrams (400 µg or micrograms) folic acid a day. Women who have a family history of neural tube defects like spina bifida should check with their doctor before becoming pregnant, as they may need even higher amounts of folic acid.

WHAT ARE GOOD SOURCES OF FOLIC ACID?

The best way to make sure you get enough folic acid is to take a folic acid supplement, as well as eating foods that have added folic acid and are naturally rich in folate. It is difficult to get enough folate from natural sources alone to reduce the risk of neural tube defects in pregnancy.

Folic acid supplements (500 µg in Australia and 800 µg in New Zealand) are available over the counter from pharmacies and through your doctor.

Foods with extra folic acid added to them (fortified) include some breakfast cereals, breads, juices and food drinks. Check the product nutrition information panel on the package to find out how much folic acid (listed as folate) is present.

Foods which are naturally high in folate are green leafy vegetables (such as broccoli, spinach and salad greens), chick peas, nuts, orange juice, some fruits and dried beans and peas.

Remember, it's also important to enjoy a wide variety of other nutritious foods every day and pregnant women have specific dietary needs that you should check with your health professional.

	SERVINGS PER PACKAGE — 20		SERVING SIZE — 30G	
	PER 30G SERVE	PER 30G WITH 1/2 CUP SKIM MILK	PER 30G	PER 100G
ENERGY	412 kJ (99 Cal)	599 kJ (143 Cal)		1374 kJ (329 Cal)
PROTEIN	3.6 g	8.1 g		11.9 g
FAT	0.8 g	0.9 g		2.8 g
CARBOHYDRATE — TOTAL				
— SUGARS	22.1 g	28.5 g		73.7 g
DIETARY FIBRE	0.8 g	7.3 g		2.8 g
CHOLESTEROL	3.2 g	3.2 g		10.7 g
SODIUM	0 mg	5 mg		0 mg
POTASSIUM	117 mg	186 mg		390 mg
THIAMIN (VIT B1) (% Aust RDI*)	0.28 mg (25%)	0.33 mg (30%)		0.92 mg (83%)
RIBOFLAVIN (VIT B2) (% Aust RDI*)	0.4 mg (25%)	0.6 mg (37%)		1.4 mg (83%)
NIACIN (% Aust RDI*)	2.5 mg (25%)	3.3 mg (33%)		8.3 mg (83%)
FOLATE ** (% Aust RDI*)	100 µg (50%)	107 µg (54%)		333 µg (166%)

* Recommended Dietary Intake

All adults should have a daily intake of 200 micrograms of folate however women who may become pregnant and those who are already pregnant should have a daily intake of 400 micrograms of folate.

Serving size is only to be used as a guide. If you have any specific dietary requirements please weigh your serving.

INGREDIENTS: wheat, dried fruits (sultanas, apples, apricots), oats, rice, oat bran, sugar, malt extract, salt, maize flour, honey, glucose, syrup, food acids (250, 262), Vitamins: thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folate).

WILL TAKING ENOUGH FOLIC ACID PREVENT ALL CASES OF NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS?

Consuming enough folic acid substantially reduces the risk of neural tube defects but it won't prevent all cases. There is more information about neural tube defects on the Australian Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association (ASBHA) website at <http://www.asbha.org.au/SpinaBifidaandHydrocephalus.htm>

ARE THERE ANY ADVERSE EFFECTS FROM TAKING FOLIC ACID?

High doses of folic acid are not known to have any adverse effects on healthy individuals. The US and Canada have had mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid since 1998 and have found this to be a successful and effective means of reducing the rate of neural tube defects.

To keep up to date with latest developments on consideration of mandatory fortification of food with folic acid, see the FSANZ website <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/whatsinfo/fortification/>.

