

folic acid



**Before and
during pregnancy**

NHS
Health
Scotland

What is folic acid?

Folic acid is a B vitamin which everyone needs to produce red blood cells.

It is known as folate when found naturally in food, or as folic acid when manufactured and added to food or used in supplements.

How much folic acid do I need?

All adults need 200 mcg each day. This usually comes from the food we eat.

Women who are thinking of becoming pregnant, or are in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, need an additional 400 mcg of folic acid daily.

During the early part of your pregnancy, babies develop very quickly and folic acid is particularly important for their development.

Taking folic acid supplements helps to protect your baby from developing neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

Most women don't know they're pregnant during the first few weeks. This is when folic acid is most important for your baby.

This is why taking a supplement of 400 mcg each day is important if you are planning to have a baby or could become pregnant.

If you are already pregnant, you should start taking folic acid supplements and talk to your midwife or GP about how long you should continue taking them.

www.readysteadybaby.org.uk

Before and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy:

- take a 400 mcg (400 μ g) folic acid supplement tablet every day
- ask your midwife or GP if you might need a higher (5 mg) dose of folic acid
- eat foods that are rich in folate.

Where can I get folic acid supplements?

Folic acid supplements are available from pharmacies and supermarkets.

Check the label to make sure the supplements contain enough folic acid (remember that you need an extra 400 mcg each day).

Every pregnant woman in Scotland is entitled to free Healthy Start vitamins which contain folic acid, vitamin C and vitamin D throughout their pregnancy. Ask a health professional for more information.

www.healthystart.nhs.uk



Which foods contain folate?

Green vegetables are good sources of folate, including:

- broccoli
- peas
- lettuce
- spinach
- spring greens.

Other good sources of folate are:

- berries
- oranges
- potatoes
- fortified breakfast cereals
- lentils.

Many breakfast cereals are fortified with folic acid – check the label.

A glass of orange juice is also a good source.

You may need more folic acid:

- if you have had a baby with, or have a family history of, neural tube defects
- if you have epilepsy or diabetes
- if you have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or over.

Your doctor will prescribe a folic acid supplement (5 mg) before pregnancy and during the first 12 weeks.

This higher dose (5 mg) of folic acid supplement is only available on prescription.

Ask your midwife or GP for further information.