

# FINE News

Folate Information Network

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## **Mandatory folic acid fortification update**

As many FINE readers are aware, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has developed a new mandatory food Standard for Australia which requires wheat flour for bread-making to contain added folic acid.

This new Standard comes into effect on Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2009 and will help to further reduce the number of neural tube defects (NTDs) each year. In New Zealand folic acid will be required to be added to bread from Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

As a result of the new Standard, FSANZ estimates that women will consume an extra 100 micrograms of folic acid every day. This is in addition to around 100 micrograms of folic acid that women currently consume from voluntarily fortified foods e.g. breakfast cereal, fruit juice. The increase in folic acid intake from mandatory fortification is expected to reduce the number of NTD-affected pregnancies in Australia by up to 14 per cent (or between 14 to 49 pregnancies) per year.

For consumers, the new Standard means that a variety of bread and bread products will contain added folic acid. However, organic wheat flour is exempt from the mandatory fortification Standard, and therefore will not contain added folic acid.

As with other food ingredients, bread manufacturers will be required to list folic acid (either 'folic acid' or 'folate') in the ingredients list on the product's label. Ingredients must be listed in descending order of ingoing weight.

'Folic acid' or 'folate' is not required to be listed in the products Nutrition Information Panel, which provides information on the amount of energy and other nutrients in the product. However, if the product carries a claim such as 'a good source of folic acid', then the amount of 'folic acid' or 'folate' is required to be listed in the products Nutrition Information Panel. On average, 100 grams of bread (roughly 3 slices) will provide about 120 micrograms of folic acid.



The amount of folic acid to be added to flour is safe for all population groups, including children. In developing the Standard, FSANZ assessed the possible adverse health effects of folic acid and concluded that the additional folic acid will not cause harm to any population group.

However as the scientific research on the health effects of folic acid, both positive and negative, is an area of active research, FSANZ has continued to watch and review the scientific literature relating to folic acid intakes and public health and safety.

To date, there has been no new evidence to change FSANZ's conclusion as to the safety of mandatory folic acid fortification. It is reassuring to know that mandatory fortification has been used safely in the United States and Canada for over 10 years and that studies show it has successfully reduced the incidence of NTDs.

## **Mandatory Iodine fortification**

At about the same time that folic acid will be added to bread-making flour, another mandatory Standard developed by FSANZ will also take effect. The mandatory iodine Standard requires the replacement of salt with iodised salt in bread (except in organic bread) in Australia and New Zealand. This will help to address the re-emergence of iodine deficiency in Australia and New Zealand.

Iodine is essential for the growth and development of young children, in particular the normal development of the brain and nervous system, especially during pregnancy and the first two to three years of life.

Both iodine and folic acid are important to the development of an unborn baby.

### Implementation

Mandatory folic acid fortification provides a safety net for women to have enough folic acid in their diets. However, the best way to make sure you have enough folic acid to help protect against most NTDs is to take a folic acid supplement.

Consuming enough folic acid substantially reduces the risk of NTDs but won't prevent all cases. If you have a family history of NTDs you may require more folic acid and should ask your doctor for advice about your individual needs.\*



A daily folic acid supplement should be taken for at least one month before and three months after conception, or as advised by a general practitioner. Look for supplements that contain at least 400 micrograms of folic acid; these will generally be supplements containing only folic acid or special pregnancy supplements.

**\*NB:** It's recommended that people with a family history of NTDs take 4000 micrograms (4mg) of folic acid daily.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should also take an iodine supplement of at least 150 micrograms to ensure their increased requirements are met.

A public launch of the new fortification Standards is expected to be held in October 2009, and will focus particularly on a variety of dietary advice specific for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

FSANZ is working with both government and non-government groups, like the Spina Bifida Foundation of Victoria, to ensure that consumers are aware of the new Standards and are provided with accurate and useful information.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has the overall coordinating role for monitoring activities for mandatory fortification. FSANZ is contributing to this by tracking key changes in the food supply and monitoring consumers' attitudes towards fortified foods.

The monitoring program will provide a basis to gauge the ongoing effectiveness of mandatory iodine and folic acid fortification.

Further information regarding mandatory folic acid and iodine fortification can be found on the FSANZ website at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

*This article has kindly been written by FSANZ.*



### SBFV Fundraiser Dinner

One of the major SBFV fundraising events this year will be a dinner to be held on Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> August in the Grand Ballroom at the Sofitel, Melbourne on Collins.

The major sponsor for this event will be Bayer Healthcare along with a number of minor sponsors who have offered to give away some wonderful gifts to all guests.

This event, which invites guests to relive their wedding day by wearing bridal gowns and dinner suits, will appeal to young newly weds. It is therefore the perfect opportunity for the SBFV to promote the folate message in the community. The dinner will provide a good forum to advertise the importance of folic acid supplements and/or a diet rich in folate.

A silent auction will be conducted at the event and items for sale will include accommodation packages, designer shoes and handbags, signed sporting memorabilia, a personal training package, antiques and many other quality products. There will also be a raffle with some fantastic prizes on offer.

If you can't make it to the event you might like to purchase raffle tickets or give a donation to help subsidize the cost of tickets for SBFV members. The cost is \$150 per person but a special members price of only \$100 is on offer.

Bookings can be made through the organizers, Lorrae and Andreina, by phoning (03) 9811 9986 or email [info@greenenergyevents.com.au](mailto:info@greenenergyevents.com.au) or you can contact the SBFV office.