

FINE News



Folate Information Network

December 2007



We wish our readers a happy holiday season and a wonderful New Year. The Spina Bifida Foundation of Victoria is now actively recruiting new members. If you would like further information or wish to join please email fine@sbfv.org.au or call (03) 9663 0075 for a confidential chat.



Did you know? Fortification and Folate

Women need to take folic acid every day, starting before they are pregnant to help prevent Neural Tube Defects (NTDs). Women of child bearing age can reduce the risk of having a child with spina bifida by taking 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day, as many pregnancies are unplanned. Women who have experienced a pregnancy affected by an NTD need a larger dose of folic acid daily, particularly if they are planning a pregnancy. (Please consult your GP for advice).

- A healthy diet that includes vitamins and minerals is critically important for reproductive health.
- Folic acid is more readily absorbed by the body compared to naturally-occurring folate.
- Mandatory and/or voluntary folic acid fortification alone may not provide women with adequate amounts. In addition to folic acid women should consume natural folate from a varied diet.
- There will be a comprehensive and independent review of mandatory folic acid fortification, which will be

initiated two years after the implementation of the standard. This review will consider in part the health impacts and the effectiveness of the initiative.

- Folic acid is a water soluble B vitamin. It is required for optimal health, growth and development. A woman's body uses folic acid to make healthy new cells for her baby.
- Because folic acid is water soluble, it does not stay in the body for very long so women need to take it every day to help reduce the risk of NTDs.
- One way to get enough folic acid is to have a breakfast cereal that has been enriched with the daily value (DV) of folic acid. Check the label on the side of the box and look for the folic acid content.

Example below:

Supplement Facts		
	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Folic Acid	400 mcg	100%
Vitamin B12	6 mcg	100%
Pantothenic Acid	5 mg	50%
Calcium	450 mg	45%
Iron	18 mg	100%
Magnesium	50 mg	12%
Zinc	15 mg	100%

Sources: FSANZ,
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Mandatory Fortification for Australia

Information provided courtesy of FSANZ



What role does Food Standards Australia New Zealand play?

- Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) develops effective food standards for Australia and New Zealand to ensure safe food.
- It is an independent statutory authority that develops standards for composition, labeling and contaminants that apply to all foods that are produced or imported for sale.
- It is one part of a strong food regulatory partnership between governments at all levels in Australia and New Zealand.
- In Australia FSANZ covers the whole food supply chain from primary production through to manufactured food and retail establishments.
- It develops standards based on input from stakeholders and ensures its advice is consistent with food regulatory policies endorsed by the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council.

- FSANZ makes decisions based on rigorous scientific assessment of any risk to public health and safety.

When will bread have to contain folic acid?

- FSANZ has allowed industry two years to prepare to add folic acid to wheat flour used in bread-making. As of 13th September 2009 bread must contain folic acid.

What foods will contain folic acid?

- Food products that are made with wheat flour for bread-making will contain folic acid under mandatory fortification.
- Examples of these foods are plain, fancy, sweet and flat breads and bread rolls, muffins, crumpets, scones, pancakes, pikelets, crepes, yeast donuts, pizza bases and crumbed products.
- Some manufacturers currently volunteer to fortify foods with folic acid, including breakfast cereal, yeast spread and fruit juice.

How will I know which foods contain folic acid?

- Manufacturers must list folic acid in the ingredient list on the labels of folic acid fortified foods.
- Unpackaged bread as well as bread that is made and/or packaged at the point of sale, for example in a baker's shop, doesn't have to have ingredient information. This information may be available on request.

Are there any adverse effects from taking folic acid?

- Based on the best scientific evidence, there is no apparent risk to public health and safety from the estimated increase in folic acid intakes as the result of mandatory fortification.
- Health authorities will be monitoring the effectiveness of the increased levels of folic acid in the food supply.



Sources of naturally occurring Folate

There are a lot of wonderful food sources of folate which cater for a variety of tastes and preferences, so there's no excuse for not getting your daily requirement. Some of the naturally occurring sources of folate include:

- Dark green, leafy vegetables (such as Spinach, Asparagus, Romaine Lettuce, Broccoli)
- Whole wheat bread
- Enriched breads and pasta
- Lightly cooked beans and peas
- Nuts and seeds
- Sprouts
- Lentils
- Oranges and grapefruits
- Liver and other organ meats (but liver shouldn't be eaten while pregnant)
- Poultry
- Fortified breakfast cereals



How nutritious are commercially-frozen vegetables?

Information courtesy of Nutrition Australia. (This information is brought to you by many nutrition professionals who regularly contribute to an email discussion group).

Freezing is a very efficient method of preserving the nutritional value, texture and flavour of many vegetables. Most vitamins will keep well in frozen vegetables.

Some losses of vitamin C and folate occur during commercial freezing. About 25% of the vitamin C, and perhaps a greater percentage of the folate, will be lost during the blanching process that precedes commercial freezing. Little further loss occurs during the time the food is kept frozen, provided that it has been stored properly (-18 degrees C for no more than six months).

However, the vitamin losses associated with blanching and the thawing/cooking process are similar to those that occur during normal cooking of fresh vegetables. This means that, provided they have been stored and then cooked properly, frozen vegetables provide similar levels of nutrition to fresh vegetables.

It is also worth noting that for cooking both frozen and fresh vegetables, microwave cooking and steaming are both superior (in terms of retaining nutritional value) than boiling in water.

