

Folic Acid: Topic of the Month

SEPTEMBER 2, 2026

Folic acid is the synthetic form of folate found in supplements and fortified foods, and it is the only form proven to help prevent neural tube defects in infants. Supplementation is critical in the first weeks of pregnancy, and because many pregnancies are unplanned, women who may become pregnant are advised to take a daily folic acid supplement. Learn more about the benefits of this essential nutrient.



The importance of folic acid

Folic acid is a type of folate, a water-soluble vitamin (vitamin B9) that helps your body make new cells. It is especially important during the rapid fetal development that occurs in the first 28 days of pregnancy and can help to prevent neural tube defects (NTD) such as anencephaly or spina bifida that affect a baby's brain or spine.

If not already taking it, participants planning a pregnancy should begin folic acid supplementation at least one month before conception and continue throughout pregnancy. Waiting until the first prenatal appointment to start folic acid will not prevent NTDs.

Folic acid supplementation

- Women of childbearing age- 400 micrograms (mcg)/day.
- Pregnant women- 400 mcg/day.
- Postpartum women- a daily multivitamin with folic acid.

It is important to note that nutrient needs during lactation differ from pregnancy, and continued use of prenatal supplements may provide excess folic acid and iron. Lactating women should not exceed the upper limit of 1,000 mcg of folic acid and 45 mg of iron and should consult a healthcare provider about appropriate supplementation while breastfeeding.

Sources of folic acid

WIC foods high in folic acid: enriched rice, bread, pasta, and corn tortillas; fortified breakfast cereals.

See [WIC Shopping Guide](#) for cereals high in folic acid. Look for the symbol: 

Other sources include fortified corn masa flour and enriched flour.

Check the labels! It is voluntary for manufacturers to list folic acid on the Nutrition Facts Label. When participants purchase WIC-allowed whole grain bread, pasta, or corn tortillas, encourage them to look for the words “enriched” or “fortified” to ensure folic acid has been added.

Because it is difficult to meet folic acid needs through diet alone, a folic acid supplement is recommended.

Prenatal vitamins

WIC staff can encourage the use of prenatal vitamins to those who are pregnant or are planning to become pregnant. Taking prenatal vitamins as part of a healthy diet can support maternal health and fetal development.



Supplement Facts		
Serving Size 1 Tablet		
	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Folate	667 mcg DFE (400 mcg folic acid)	167%
Vitamin B12	6 mcg	250%
Pantothenic Acid	10 mg	200%
Calcium	200 mg	15%
Iron	18 mg	100%
Magnesium	100 mg	24%
Zinc	11 mg	100%

WIC does not recommend a particular brand of vitamins. We can provide education to help participants identify prenatal vitamins with the recommended amount of folic acid in stores.

Did you know Medical Assistance covers prenatal vitamins with a prescription from a primary care provider? If the participant has private health insurance, they can ask their insurance company's Member Services if their plan covers the prescribed prenatal vitamin. If they need to purchase a prenatal vitamin, they can ask their pharmacist to recommend a low-cost prenatal vitamin with iron.

Participant tips:

- Anyone who could become pregnant or is pregnant should start taking folic acid daily.
- Check the supplement label to be sure it contains 400 mcg of folic acid/day.
- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure which vitamin is right for you.

MTHFR and folic acid

Some participants may report that they have an MTHFR gene variant and have heard they should take a different form of folate instead of folic acid. Although individuals with this type of variant will have somewhat reduced enzyme activity to convert folic acid into folate, they can still safely and effectively process folic acid. There are no evidence-based recommendations that they should take a different amount of folic acid or a different form of folate. They should take 400 mcg of folic acid.

Hispanic/Latina families

Hispanic/Latina women have a greater risk of having a baby with an NTD. Different factors may be involved, such as disparities with diet and less access to supplements. Recently, some manufacturers began adding folic acid to the corn masa flour used to make corn tortillas and other Latin American foods. Encourage those who use corn tortillas to choose brands that are enriched with folic acid.

Resources

[Prenatal Vitamins](#)

[Stay Healthy](#)

[Maternal Diet and Breastfeeding](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 27, 2026.

[About Folic Acid](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 15, 2026.

[Folate and Folic Acid on the Nutrition and Supplement Facts Labels](#) – U.S. Food and Drug Administration, March 5, 2024.

[MTHFR Gene Variant and Folic Acid Facts](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 16, 2026.

References – complete listing of hyperlinks

Maternal Diet and Breastfeeding (<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/hcp/diet-micronutrients/maternal-diet.html>)

Shopping Guide (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/vendor/fpchng/shopguide.pdf>)

Prenatal Vitamins

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/pgprenatalvits.pdf>)

Stay Healthy (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/genstayhealthy.pdf>)

About Folic Acid (<https://www.cdc.gov/folic-acid/about/index.html>)

Folate and Folic Acid on the Nutrition and Supplement Facts Labels

(<https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-facts-label/folate-and-folic-acid-nutrition-and-supplement-facts-labels>)

MTHFR Gene Variant and Folic Acid Facts (<https://www.cdc.gov/folic-acid/data-research/mthfr/index.html>)

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