



Focus on folate for health, not the blues

I've heard that taking folate can help combat depression. Is that true?

Actually, the evidence for this link is not very strong, although researchers are continuing to investigate possible connections low folate might have on the treatment for major depression.

For example, several studies have noted a low folate concentration in the blood of patients with major depression. And a review of the research in a 2006 issue of the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* suggests that supplementing antidepressant medication with folic acid (the synthetic form of folate) seems to enhance the medication's results.

Still, all of this is a far cry from taking a folic acid supplement in an attempt to battle the blues. So far, no one is recommending such self-treatment in place of getting care for depression by a qualified healthcare provider.

That said, you should know that folate — a B complex vitamin — is beneficial in many ways. It's essential, along with vitamins B12 and C, to help the body break down, use and create new proteins. It also helps form new red blood cells, and a deficiency in folate can result in anemia. In addition, folate helps DNA form, tissues grow, and cells work.

Folate deficiency is uncommon because it's in a wide variety of foods. Still, women who are considering becoming pregnant should make certain they're getting enough every day as preventive measure

against certain birth defects, including spina bifida and anencephaly. These neural tube defects develop within 18 to 30 days after conception — which is often before a woman even knows she's pregnant. Of the 2,500 infants born in the United States each year with such a defect, about half are estimated to be linked to inadequate folic acid intake by the mother.

Starting in 1998, most grain-based foods, including enriched bread, flour, rice, macaroni and noodles, were required to be fortified with folic acid as a way to combat folate deficiency, although most breads, for example, contain just 8 percent of the recommended amount of folate per serving. Breakfast cereals are also often fortified with the vitamin. Foods that naturally contain folate include beans and legumes; citrus fruits and juices; wheat bran and other whole grains; dark green leafy vegetables; and poultry, pork, shellfish and liver.

Anyone 14 years old or older should get 400 micrograms of folate per day. Pregnant women should get 600 micrograms, and breastfeeding women should get 500 micrograms. Getting too much usually isn't harmful, because, like most other water-soluble vitamins, the body regularly removes it through urine.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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