



Patient Information Sheet

Folic Acid

Introduction

This leaflet explains the importance of folic acid to maintain good health and formation of red blood cells. Folic acid which occurs naturally in the body is called 'folate'.

What does folic acid do?

- Folic acid, together with vitamin B12 is necessary to form red blood cells.
- A deficiency can reduce the ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen which is called 'anaemia'.
- Both vitamins together help nerves to function properly.
- Folic acid is essential in the formation of DNA (genetic material) in every body cell which enables each cell to replicate perfectly.

Sources of folic acid

Folic acid is a water soluble vitamin (dissolves easily in water) and so it is lost from vegetables during cooking. This can be reduced by not over-cooking and steaming and microwaving vegetables instead of boiling.

Folate is found naturally in a wide variety of foods and is also present in foods fortified with folic acid. These include:

- Spinach, kale, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, broccoli.
- Beans and legumes (e.g. peas, blackeye beans).
- Yeast and beef extracts.
- Oranges and orange juice.
- Wheat bran and other whole grain foods.
- Poultry, pork, shellfish and liver.
- Fortified foods (e.g. some brands of breakfast cereals – check the label).

Folic acid supplements

Anyone who is over the age of 50 or with a history of bowel cancer, should not take

folic acid supplements containing more than 200µg/day. Other adults should be below 1mg per day from fortified foods and supplements with lower amounts for children. This is currently under review.

Signs and symptoms of folic acid deficiency

- Tiredness (caused by anaemia)
- Weakness.
- Diarrhoea,
- Loss of appetite.
- Weight loss.
- Headaches.
- Heart palpitations.
- Sore tongue.
- Behavioural disorders.
- Not getting enough folate in your diet such as during pregnancy.
- Crohn's disease or untreated coeliac disease.
- Medications such as water tablets (diuretics).
- Alcoholism.

Folic acid and heart disease

Folic acid supplements can reduce high levels of homocysteine (an amino acid in the blood that irritates blood vessels). This has been associated with increased risk of heart attack or stroke.

A slight reduction in stroke with supplementation has been recently shown in some research however, results are inconclusive and more research is required to understand this finding.

Contact details

If you have any questions, please ask the PreAMS team who will be happy to discuss any queries you have.

PreAMS, Royal Stoke Hospital

Sunday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm

Tel: **01782 676561**

PreAMS, County Hospital

Monday to Saturday 8.00am to 6.00pm

Tel: **01785 236197**

Please speak to a member of staff if you need this leaflet in large print, braille, audio or another language.