



## Folic Acid - Pregnancy



**Folic acid or folate has been shown in multiple studies to significantly reduce the incidence of neural tube defects. Neural tube defects include spina bifida, encephalocele and anencephaly. Effects were measured to range between 50 – 85% reduction in these conditions.**

Folic acid is believed to assist our bodies to repair damaged DNA and produce red blood cells. It is widely used by the embryo and fetus in multiple organ systems to ensure normal growth and development.

Other benefits of folic acid supplementation have come to light in recent times. It is thought to reduce miscarriage rates and rates of preterm delivery.

If you are planning a pregnancy, it is wise to start a folic acid supplement at least 3 months prior to conception. A daily dose of at least 500 mcg is required. Folic acid is a B group vitamin which is water soluble. This means you cannot overdose on folic acid.

Excess folic acid is expelled in the urine and gives it a bright yellow or orange tinge.

Unfortunately, 50 – 60% pregnancies in Australia are unplanned and women have not prepared adequately. Since October 2009, wheat flour for bread making has been fortified with folic acid in line with Food Standards Australia and New Zealand to combat this problem.

### **Natural sources of folic acid include:**

- 1. Leafy green vegetables** -Spinach, asparagus, broccoli, kale
- 2. Fruits** - Oranges, bananas, strawberries.
- 3. Legumes** - Chickpeas, dried beans and lentils.
- 4. Cereals, nuts and yeast extract such as Vegemite.**

**Folic acid may also be taken as a supplement on its own or in a good pregnancy multivitamin.**