

# Folic acid protects against hosts of ills

BY CHRISTINE PALUMBO  
SPECIAL WRITER

Folic acid, a B vitamin also known as folate, has been shown to protect against neural tube defects such as spina bifida (a birth defect in which the spinal cord is not completely encased in bone) and anencephaly (a fatal defect in which part of the brain never develops).

It may also prevent oral birth defects such as cleft palate.

Folic acid may also help protect against heart disease by reducing the amount of homocysteine in your blood. Too much homocysteine can double your risk of heart attack, stroke or peripheral vascular disease.

Folic acid may play a role in prevention of several types of cancer, including cervical, colon and rectal cancer. And recent research shows it may help reduce the incidence of certain types of depression.

## How much do we need?

A blue-ribbon-panel advisory panel formed by the National Academy of Sciences urged all adults, especially newly pregnant women, to get at least 400 micrograms of folic acid in their daily diets. Unfortunately, only 32 percent of all American adults are getting enough folate.

## Adding folate to your diet

Begin your day with a cup of orange juice (110 micrograms). Eat 1 cup whole-wheat cereal such as Wheaties for another 100 micrograms. A banana would add 24 micrograms. Lunch on a chicken Caesar salad (dressing on the side) for another 76 micrograms per cup of romaine lettuce. A 1/2-cup of kidney, white Northern or black beans in soup provides about 100 micrograms.

## Where to find folate

Leafy vegetables, dried beans, some fruits, liver, yeast breads, wheat germ and some fortified cereals are among the good sources of folate. Most enriched grain products — bread, flour, cornmeal, corn grits, pasta, rice and farina — must be fortified with folic acid, according to a recent law.

To get more folic acid, eat plenty of beans, fruits and vegetables — preferably



**Finding folate:** Increasing your intake of folic acid could be the formula for better health.

raw or lightly cooked. Half the folic acid in foods can be lost in cooking.

## Sources of folate:

Lentils (1 cup cooked), 358 micrograms.  
Black-eyed peas, dried (1 cup cooked), 350 micrograms.  
Pinto beans, 294 micrograms.  
Kidney beans (1 cup cooked) 229 micrograms.  
Garbanzo beans (1 cup cooked) 282 micrograms.  
Sunflower seeds, dry-roasted (1/2 cup), 135 micrograms.  
Okra (1/2 cup cooked), 135 micrograms.  
Asparagus (five spears), 110 micrograms.  
Black beans (1 cup cooked), 256 micrograms.  
Most ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, 100 to 400 micrograms (read labels).  
Spinach, boiled (1/2 cup) 130 micrograms.  
Collards, frozen (1/2 cup), 65 micrograms.  
Grapefruit juice (1 cup), 55 micrograms.  
Navy beans, boiled (1/2 cup), 125 micrograms.  
Wheat germ (1/4 cup), 80 micrograms.  
Avocado (1/2 cup), 55 micrograms.  
Orange (medium), 45 micrograms.  
orange juice (1 cup), 109 micrograms.

*Source: Nutritional values from "Boyes & Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used" by Jean A.T. Pennington.*

# Sneak power foods into diet for extra nutrition

BY JASON EFFMANN  
SPECIAL WRITER

Surprise! Starving yourself is bad for you. So, coincidentally, are a good deal of the diets that have crashed, then burned, onto the scene of late.

Louder and stronger comes the voice of reason: a consistent, well-balanced diet and regular exercise are the healthiest ways to lose weight.

That established, how can you ensure you're getting everything you need while counting calories?

There are dozens of foods out there, most recently being referred to as "power foods," that do just that — pack a wallop without tacking on extra pounds.

The trick is not only finding them, but smuggling them into your diet with enough regularity — and taste — to reap the benefits.

The following 10 items, which in no way comprise an exhaustive list, all made the International Food Information Council Foundation's Functional Foods listing as foods that go beyond providing basic nutrition.

**1. Broccoli:** A nutrient-dense vegetable, broccoli is rich in vitamin C, calcium, fiber, water (an oft-underestimated necessity), potassium, folic acid and phytochemicals, which help fend off heart disease and some forms of cancer, and only 22 calories for 1/2 cup of the cooked version.

**2. Fat-free milk:** As much as one-third of the recommended daily amount of calcium can come from an 8-ounce serving of fat-free milk, with only 90 calories. Then throw in vitamin D (which the body needs to utilize calcium), protein and riboflavin for free.

**3. Oatmeal:** The old-fashioned oats that cook in three minutes are the least processed, and the more natural the form, the healthier it is. Oatmeal has a type of soluble fiber, beta glucan, which helps lower blood cholesterol and smooths out the peaks and valleys of blood sugar, a helpful thing for people trying to lose weight. It's also so inexpensive, especially if you're eating the old-fashioned kind.

**4. Beans or legumes:** Another fiber-rich item, beans are also a good protein

source, something to consider now that diets high in meats are held in such low regard these days. Current research is showing we need to move more to a plant-based diet with the majority of a person's calories coming from plant-based foods.

**5. Whole-wheat bread:** Here's a gimme — whole-wheat breads have been talked up for years as beneficial for their source of fiber. There's more to it, though: whole grains have been shown to reduce the risk of diabetes. They temper the cholesterol level, keep us full longer, and reduce the risk of death to such things as heart disease and some cancers. Some necessary trace minerals are also found in whole-wheat bread, and the same can be said for other grains.

**6. Bulgur:** A whole-wheat kernel that's been cracked. Bulgur can be cooked like rice, and incorporated into dishes like stuffed peppers.

**7. Brown rice:** The outside husk of rice is the part with most of the minerals attached to it, and though brown rice takes twice as long to cook as white rice, the benefit from the trace minerals is worth it.

**8. Orange juice:** Vitamin C, OJ's most recognizable commodity, isn't the only thing that makes it worth reaching for. Orange juice is a good source of folic acid, which women of childbearing age need. It's also being shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, and is, of course, an excellent source of fluids. Calcium-fortified orange juice can give those who can't stomach milk a means of keeping their bones strong.

**9. Spinach and cabbage:** With 21 calories per 1/2 cup of spinach, Popeye gets 3 grams of protein, as well as a good source of fiber that is extremely high in vitamin A, and high in the B vitamins. It is also rich in folic acid. Cabbage has only nine calories per 1/2 cup, and is another source of vitamin C, potassium and the B vitamins.

**10. Sweet potatoes:** Rounding off the top 10, sweet potatoes are high in vitamin A. When baked, the average potato is 120 calories. For that paltry sum, you get complex carbohydrates, fiber, vitamin A, some vitamin C, potassium and other phytochemicals.

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