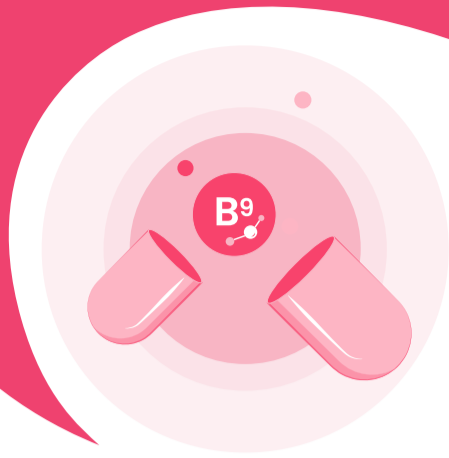


In focus: Folic acid for preconception



The preconception period is defined as the three months before conception, as this is the average time it takes for fertile couples to become pregnant.¹

During this period majority of women of reproductive age (96%) have iron and folate dietary deficiency.¹



Folic acid is a manmade form of folate that everyone needs.²



Folate is also known as vitamin B9.²



It helps the body form healthy red blood cells.²

Preconceptional benefits of folic acid



Folic acid helps form the neural tube and reduces the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs): spina bifida, anencephaly, and encephalocele.³

➡ It may reduce the risk of NTDs by up to 70%.⁴

Recommendation

- The World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that high-risk women attempting to **become pregnant should receive** 400 mcg of folic acid at least 3 months before pregnancy until 12 weeks of gestation in addition to folate-rich food.^{3,5}
- A higher intake of up to 4 mg folic acid is recommended for women desirous of getting pregnant and who have had a history of neural tube defects.⁵
- Supplementation is recommended in the preconception period because neural tube closure may occur before many **women are aware of their pregnancy.**^{3,5,6}



Food sources of Folate²



Broccoli



Brussels sprouts



liver (to avoid during pregnancy)



Peas



breakfast cereals fortified with folic acid



chickpeas and kidney beans



Leafy green vegetables, such as cabbage, kale, spring greens and spinach

Summary

- Folate and folic acid are important for everyone, but especially for women who are in **reproductive age and want to conceive.**
- A varied diet rich in folate coupled **with supplementation of 400 mcg** of Folic acid daily is a must to help reduce the chance of having a baby with NTDs.
- Since not all pregnancies are planned, **it is ideal for all women who can become pregnant** to meet this recommendation for optimum pregnancy outcomes and maternal and fetal health.

References

1. Rogers LM, et al. Ann N Y Acad Sci 2018;1431(1):35-57. 2. The National Health Service. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-b/>. Accessed 28 August 2022. 3. Kim J, et al. Nutr Res Pract 2017;11(3):240-246 4. De-Regil LM, et al. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2010;(10):CD007950. 5. Centers for Disease Control. MMWR Recomm Rep 1992;41(RR-14):1-7. 6. Toivonen KI, et al. Prev Med 2018;114:1-17.