

FOLIC ACID FORTIFICATION

Folate is an essential B-vitamin, required in the production of new cells and is especially important for neonatal development.

Mandatory fortification of white wheat flour, enriched pasta and enriched cornmeal with folic acid came into effect in 1998. The amount of folic acid that should be added is 0.15 mg per 100 g of flour.

Since then a number of positive results have been observed from the increase intake of folic acid including:

Improved folate status in Canadian women;

- Approximately 50% reduction in neural tube defects in infants across Canada;
- A reduction in serum homocysteine levels, an indicator of cardiovascular disease risk; and
- A reduction in neuroblastoma, a tumor seen in infants.

The Baking Association of Canada continues to advocate for a folic acid health claim related to these positive outcomes from fortification.

Fast facts about folate

Folate is the umbrella term used interchangeably with the terms folic acid and folacin.

Folate comes in two forms:

- 1) **naturally occurring in food.** Food folate is in a bound form and the body only absorbs about 50%. Primary sources are legumes, green leafy vegetables, some fruits and wheat germ.
- 2) **synthetic folate**, often referred to as folic acid, has an absorption rate of 85-100%. This is the form in supplements and in fortified food.

To address the difference in absorption rates, folate values are determined by

Dietary Folate Equivalents.

1µg food folate = 1 DFE

1µg folic acid (fortified food) = 1.7 DFE