

CAN YOU GIVE UP SMOKING AND DRINKING?

Smoking is **always** bad for your developing baby. Too much alcohol is also bad - and no one really knows how much is too much.

Can you give up, at least for the present? Your baby will be the better for it - and so will you!



Exercise regularly: swimming and walking are good, but ask advice before you do aerobics or play strenuous games like tennis.

Above all, keep in touch with your doctor, health visitor and midwife, and attend your ante-natal clinics regularly.

This way, you will give your baby the best start you possibly can.

SPONSORED BY the makers of 'Marmite' yeast extract. Compiled in collaboration with registered charity ASBAH, The Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, which provides the only voluntary source of support for children born with NTD, and their families. Donations, warmly welcomed, can be sent to ASBAH at 42 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2UQ.

Health professionals can obtain copies of this leaflet from Sylvia Meredith Health Education Advisory Service, 3 Elgin Road, Sutton, Surrey SM1 3SN.

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FOLIC ACID IN VARIOUS FOODS

Average portions (g)	Folic acid (µg)
Lettuce wedge (80)	(42)
Cabbage (90)*	(26)
Brussels sprouts (90)*	(99)
Runner beans (90)*	(38)
Broccoli (45)*	(58)
Peas (65)*	(30)
Can of baked beans (225)	(50)
'MARMITE' yeast extract (4)	(40)
Small bag plain peanuts (40)	(44)
Bowl cornflakes (40)	(100)
Bowl muesli (50)	(70)
Orange (150)	(46)
10 Strawberries (120)	(24)
Slice of roast beef (40)	(7)
Boiled egg (60)	(23)
Milk on cereal (100)	(6)

***Cooked vegetables:** Values given for folic acid are for boiled vegetables. If they are steamed, values for folic acid may be somewhat higher.

References: McCance & Widdowson's *The Composition of Foods*, 5th edition. Royal Society of Chemistry. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. London HMSO 1991. Crawley H. *Food Portion Sizes*. MAFF. London HMSO 1988.

THINKING ABOUT PREGNANCY?

Make sure you get enough FOLIC ACID in your food.

NEW RESEARCH shows that some birth defects may be prevented if the mother takes a vitamin called **folic acid** before she conceives, and in the early days of pregnancy.

These birth defects are called **Neural Tube Defects (NTD)**, because they result from a malformation of the 'neural tube' (the tube that forms the spinal cord) in the very earliest days of a baby's development in the womb - perhaps even before the woman thinks she may be pregnant.

The most commonly known NTD is **spina bifida**, which may lead to the condition called **hydrocephalus**, where an excess of spinal fluid causes the child's head to swell. Treatment is available, but either of these conditions means a disability for life.

Tests in seven countries have shown that if a woman takes extra folic acid before conceiving, and in early pregnancy, **she is much less likely to have a baby with NTD.**

Compiled by Sylvia Meredith
Health Education Advisory Service
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and Hydrocephalus.



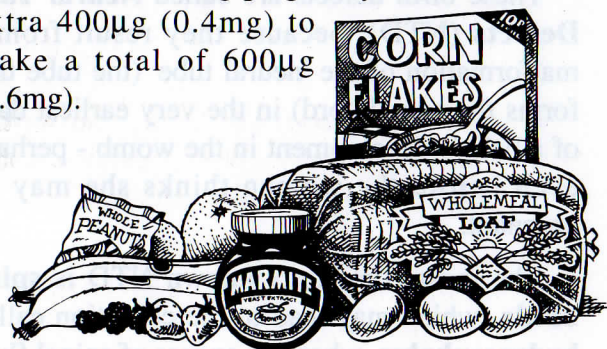
EVERYONE NEEDS FOLIC ACID

Folic acid is one of the B-group vitamins. It helps to build the cells that make up the body. Everyone needs it: men, women and children, young and old alike.

It is important for all women, especially those who are planning to have a baby.

Today the Government recommends that all women of childbearing age should be told about folic acid, and how to obtain it in their food.

A healthy adult needs 200µg (0.2mg) of folic acid everyday, but women who are pregnant or who are considering pregnancy need more - an extra 400µg (0.4mg) to make a total of 600µg (0.6mg).



WHAT FOODS CONTAIN FOLIC ACID?

Some foods that contain folic acid are:

Fresh or frozen vegetables, particularly green leafy vegetables.

'Marmite' yeast extract.

Many breakfast cereals (read the pack for details).

Oranges and other citrus fruits, bananas, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries.

Nuts, particularly peanuts and hazelnuts.

Wholemeal and fortified white bread.

Eggs.

IMPORTANT: If you have already had a baby affected by NTD

The suggestions in this leaflet are for women with no previous history of NTD.

If you have had any trouble with NTD, you should consult your doctor before you conceive again, so that you can get a prescription for extra folic acid.

A WORD ABOUT LIVER

Liver contains a lot of folic acid, **but the Government advises women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy to avoid it**, because liver contains large amounts of Vitamin A which could be harmful during pregnancy. This also goes for foods made from liver, such as faggots, liver paté and liver sausage.

For the same reason, these women should **avoid taking vitamin supplements** that contain Vitamin A, unless they are prescribed by a doctor or an ante-natal clinic.

TAKE CARE OF THE FOLIC ACID IN YOUR FOOD

Canned foods contain very little folic acid, but you can do a lot to make sure that the **fresh food** you cook keeps as much of its folic acid as possible.

Folic acid dissolves in water, and cooking food for too long will destroy it. The shorter the cooking time, and the less water you use, the better.

So try using a microwave oven, or use a steamer instead of boiling. Stir frying is another quick and effective way to cook food without losing folic acid.

EATING FOR GOOD HEALTH

We all need a **mixture** of nutrients from our food, including protein, carbohydrate, vitamins, minerals and a little fat. No single food provides everything. Some foods contain very little folic acid, but they give us other things we need.

These foods include milk, cheese and potatoes - and for non-vegetarians, such things as meat poultry and fish.

There are **FOUR main groups of food**, and we should eat some food from each group daily.

Bread and cereals. Plan your meals around bread, potatoes, cereals, rice or pasta, especially the wholegrain varieties. These are filling without being too fattening.

Fruit and vegetables. Eat fresh fruit and vegetables when they are in season. Frozen vegetables are as good for you as fresh ones.

Milk, yoghurt and cheese. Milk and milk products, such as cheese and yoghurt, give us a lot of calcium and protein. Skimmed and semi-skimmed milk give us the same calcium and protein, but less fat so they are lower in calories.

Meat and meat alternatives. These include all lean meat and poultry (but see the advice about liver on opposite page), fish of all kinds, eggs, pulses (such as peas, beans and lentils), nuts, seeds, and special protein foods for vegetarians.

'Marmite' yeast extract is a good vegetarian source of folic acid and other B-group vitamins, including Vitamin B₁₂ which is especially important for vegans and others who do not eat foods that come from animals.