Getting enough Folate
The easiest way is to take a vitamin pill. Most U.S. multivitamins have 400 micrograms (mcg) folic acid. Check the label on the bottle to be sure or you can take a pill that only contains folic acid. Not all vitamin bottles have the amounts of vitamins that their labels say they do. And they may contain harmful chemicals. When choosing a brand of vitamins, look for a mark that says USP or NSF. These “seals of approval” mean that the pills are safe and have the amounts of vitamins stated on the label.

You can also eat foods that are high in folate, such as:
- Beans and lentils
- Peas (black-eyed peas, chickpeas, green peas)
- Juices (orange, tomato, grapefruit, pineapple)
- Fruits (oranges, cantaloupe, honey-dew melon, avocado, papaya, rasp-berries)
- Soymilk
- Vegetables (green leafy vegetables - spinach, lettuce, turnip greens, mustard greens, collard greens, and Chinese cabbage; broccoli; Brussels sprouts; asparagus; artichokes; okra; corn; cauliflower; potato; beets; green onions; sweet red peppers)
- Nuts, sunflower seeds, Peanuts and peanut butter
- Liver or Giblets

You can also eat foods that have had folic acid added to them, such as breakfast cereals, breads, flours, pastas, cornmeal or white rice.

Advanced OB/GYN Associates at Westchester Medical Center offers the full spectrum of obstetric and gynecologic care. From routine gynecologic exams to advanced infertility treatments and beyond, we are dedicated to building a relationship with our patients that can grow as they do, from adolescence through their senior years. Whatever the age or stage of a woman’s life, we educate and care for all of our patients with exceptional skill and compassion.
Folate and Folic Acid

Folate is a vitamin found naturally in many foods. Folate helps your body make new cells. Folic acid is the man-made form of folate. It can be taken in vitamin pills. It is also added to many grain products including cereals, breads and flours.

Folate helps keep your blood healthy. Not getting enough can cause a type of anemia meaning you have fewer healthy red blood cells than normal. This makes it hard for your blood to carry enough oxygen throughout your body.

It is important that women get enough folate because it can also help prevent some birth defects. Getting enough folate before and during pregnancy can help prevent certain defects of the baby’s spine and brain including:

- **Spina bifida** is a problem with the spine where nerves that control leg movements and other functions do not work. Children with spina bifida often have lifelong disabilities.
- **Anencephaly** is when most or all of the brain does not develop. Babies with this problem die before or shortly after birth.

Experts think that folate might also help prevent some cancers, Alzheimer’s disease and hearing loss as you age. More research is needed to know this for certain.

### How much Folate?

All women capable of pregnancy need 400 to 800 micrograms (mcg) of folate each day, even if they are not planning to get pregnant. Folate is needed before and during the first weeks of pregnancy to help prevent birth defects. Because half of all pregnancies in the United States are not planned, women who can become pregnant should get the recommended amount. That way, if they do become pregnant their babies will be less likely to have birth defects.

Pregnant women need 400 to 800 mcg of folic acid in the **very early stages of pregnancy often before they know that they are pregnant**. A pregnant woman should continue taking folic acid throughout pregnancy. Women should discuss their folic acid needs with their doctors. Breastfeeding women need 500 mcg. Some doctors suggest that breast-feeding women simply continue taking their prenatal vitamins to be sure they are getting plenty of folic acid while they are breastfeeding and should they become pregnant again.

Talk with your doctor about how much folic acid to take if:

- You had a baby with spina bifida or anencephaly and want to get pregnant again. Your doctor may give you a prescription for 4,000 mcg folic acid. That is 10 times the normal dose. Taking this high dose of folic acid can reduce your chances of having another baby with these birth defects.
- You have a family member with spina bifida. Your doctor may give you a prescription for 4,000 mcg folic acid.
- You have spina bifida and want to get pregnant.
- You are taking medicines that affect how your body uses folate. These include some of the medicines for:
  - Epilepsy
  - Type 2 diabetes
  - Rheumatoid arthritis
  - Psoriasis
  - Inflammatory bowel disease
- You have kidney disease and are on dialysis.
- You have liver disease.
- You have celiac disease.
- You abuse alcohol.

### Too much folate/folic acid?

You can't get too much folate from foods that naturally have folate. But it is possible for some people to get too much folic acid. Taking more than 1,000 mcg of folic acid a day may cause nerve damage in people who do not have enough vitamin B12 in their bodies. People at risk for not having enough vitamin B12 include:

- People who don’t eat meat, eggs, or dairy products (vegans)
- People ages 50 years and older

Compiled from materials developed by the Office on Women’s Health in the Department of Health & Human Services.