

Study May Dispel Worries About High Levels of Folic Acid

Source: Health.com

Consuming high amounts of folate - through supplements and foods fortified with folic acid - does not disrupt a healthy body's use of vitamin B12, according to new research.

Folic acid - the synthetic form of the vitamin folate - is added to grain products in the United States to reduce women's risk of conceiving a child with a neural tube birth defect. But some worry that folic acid levels in these foods may be too high for other people. Their concerns stem from studies that found that people with low B12 levels and high folate levels were more likely to have anemia than those with low B12 levels and normal folate levels.

B12 is needed to make red blood cells, and people with low levels of B12 can develop anemia, as well as numbness and tingling in the hands and feet.

The new study found, however, that anemia and other problems related to low levels of vitamin B12 were not likely to get worse with higher intake of folic acid.

It included more than 2,500 university students who reported the amount and type of folic acid-fortified foods and folic acid supplements they consumed in the previous week and in an average month. Blood samples collected from the participants showed that about 5 percent were B12 deficient. Of the students with low B12 levels, there was no significant difference in rates of anemia between those with high and those with low folate levels.

The study, conducted by researchers at the U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and five other institutions in the United States, Ireland and Norway, was published online June 8 in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

"Our findings are reassuring for people who have low vitamin B12 levels," Dr. James L. Mills, the study's first author, said in a U.S. National Institutes of Health news release. "We found no evidence that folate could worsen their health problems."

Natural sources of folate include leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits and beans.