



NLOSS

North London Obesity Surgery Service

Folate

Patient Information

About folate and folate deficiency: What does folate do?

Folate (folic acid, B9) is one of the B-complex vitamins. It is important for the brain, including maintaining mental health. Folate is part of the manufacture of our DNA and RNA, so it is needed for making new cells – because of this, it is very important for pregnancy, infancy, adolescence, and any time you need to grow new tissue (such as after an injury or surgery). Folate also works with B12 to make red blood cells and plays a role in maintaining the health of the cardiovascular system, nervous system, and digestive system.

What happens if my folate is low / if I do not get enough folate?

If you do not have enough B12 you may notice that you become fatigued easily and feel tired and weak. You may experience dizziness, heart palpitations (rapid heartbeats) and feel short of breath.

Other common symptoms are poor appetite, sore/swollen tongue, and diarrhoea.

If folate deficiency is allowed to progress, complications can develop including severe nerve damage, memory loss, heart disease and possibly some forms of cancer. If you are a woman with folate deficiency and you become pregnant, you risk having a miscarriage or having a baby with serious birth defects. Folate deficiency is also associated with a form of anaemia that causes large blood cells.

What are other symptoms?

- Memory loss/changes
- Gum disease, mouth sores
- Burning sensation around mouth
- Irritability and depression
- Psychosis
- Muscle weakness, difficulty walking
- Ankle swelling
- Changes in vision



Where can I get folate?

The major source of folate in the British diet is in fortified foods such as cereals and bread. Natural sources of folate include oranges/orange juice, green vegetables, peanuts, peas, sprouts, liver and soybeans. Folate is also found in dietary supplements such as multivitamins, B-complex vitamins and alone in tablets or capsules. If you have a folate deficiency, your doctor will probably ask you to take supplemental folate and watch your dietary intake.

Other important things

If you have had weight loss surgery, chances are that you are not eating many of the foods that are fortified with folate. For this reason, it is very important that you have another source such as a multivitamin with folate in it. If you are a woman, it is recommended you have a healthy folate level for a full year before becoming pregnant. If you are considering pregnancy, you should discuss testing with your doctor. If you have a folate deficiency, it is important that you follow up with your doctor for lab tests and other recommended care.

**Should you need more information, please contact
our Specialist Bariatric Dietitians on 0207 288 5989.**

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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