

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Keep Those Cells Growing**

No matter how young or old we are, our body cells have to keep growing and dividing. We'd be in really bad shape if they didn't. All our skin would rub off and we'd be bare muscle. We'd soon run out of blood, since red blood cells only last about 3 months each. No scratches or cuts would heal. Our intestines would get smooth and raw. Our hair would fall out and never grow in again. What a mess!

One of the vitamins that is absolutely essential to keep cells dividing is folic acid or folate. It is one of the B vitamins. Fresh orange juice is a very good source. So are dark green leafy vegetables, beans and asparagus. Its name, folate, comes from the same word as foliage, the leaves on trees. But interestingly, this is one vitamin that we can absorb better in the synthetic form.

In 1998 the government mandated that cereal products should all be fortified with folate. This was because a major reason for many birth defects in babies was that their moms were not eating enough folate. Without this vitamin the babies could not make all the cells they needed, so they were born with problems. Since our cereals have added folate to our diets the number of babies born with defects has dropped a lot.

But folate does more than just let cells grow. It is also part of the control system that doesn't let them grow too fast. When cells start growing out of control, the result is cancer. Getting more folate seems to slow the development of various kinds of cancer. And it reduces some of the side effects in people taking certain kinds of chemotherapy

for cancer. It lets them get higher doses without damaging their livers. Folate might also lower our risk of getting heart disease. Somehow it seems to make nitroglycerin, the medication for angina and heart pains, more effective.

Another very interesting use for folate that is getting a lot of investigation these days is whether we can use folate to treat depression, and maybe even Alzheimer's disease. One study found that folate made antidepressant medicines more effective, although it worked better in women than it did in men.

Higher intakes of folate seem to help some people handle the medications for arthritis without side effects. But there are a lot of medications that could lower your folate levels. Some make your body break it down faster, others don't let our bodies absorb it as well. With so many people suffering from all these different diseases, you can see why there's a lot of medical interest in folate.

But please, don't start taking large doses without talking to your doctor first. High doses of folate can hide the effects of other vitamin deficiencies. If no one notices that your B-12 levels are low because you're taking lots of folate, you could end up with permanent nerve damage. If you go too high on the folate you could start suffering from cramps and diarrhea.

The standard recommendation is that men and women over 14 years old should be getting at least 400 mcg a day. But, pregnant women need 600 mcg and women who are breastfeeding their babies need 500 mcg. Folate-supplemented cereals and flour are good sources. Besides the greens, asparagus and orange juice, eating beef liver and soy beans are also good ways to get folate. And folate supplements can help too.

Fresh asparagus is in the stores now. Here's an easy and great tasting summer salad to boost your folate intake. Add diced cooked chicken or ham to make it a meal.

#### Red and Green Salad

1 pound asparagus, trimmed	1 small zucchini, halved
1 cup grape tomatoes	1/4 cup sliced green onions
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley	3 Tbsp olive oil
2 Tbsp red wine vinegar	1 clove garlic, minced
1/4 tsp seasoned salt	1/2 tsp Dijon mustard

Cut asparagus and zucchini in 1 inch pieces. Steam until tender (in microwave or over boiling water). Rinse in cold water to chill. Combine all vegetables in large bowl. In small bowl whisk rest of ingredients together. Pour sauce over vegetables and toss gently to coat. If desired, sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese and sunflower kernels. Chill until ready to serve. Serves 6.

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