

# Folic acid deficiency – a leaflet from Ivy Grove Surgery

Dear

You have been issued with a prescription for folic acid tablets as recent blood tests have shown you to be deficient in folic acid. This leaflet is to explain about folic acid deficiency and its treatment.

## **What is folic acid?**

Folic acid belongs to the vitamin B group. Folic acid, and together with its sister vitamin, vitamin B12, are both necessary to form new blood cells and to help nerves to function properly. Folic acid is created by bacteria in the intestines, and also absorbed from eating normal healthy foods. The daily requirement is about 100-200microgrammes per day and there are generally sufficient body stores for about four months.

## **How did I develop folic acid deficiency?**

Often the cause is dietary. Sometimes folic acid deficiency may be associated with long-term disease or alcoholism. Some drugs and bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease may also prevent absorption of folic acid. Deficiency may also occur if requirements increase, such as during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

## **What symptoms might I get?**

You may not get any symptoms, and many cases we find are purely incidental in the course of our investigations. If deficiency is severe it may result in some general symptoms caused by anaemia – like tiredness, weakness, breathlessness, feeling faint, headaches, pale skin and palpitations. Lack of folic acid can also cause headaches, a sore tongue and very rarely behavioural disorders.

## **Which foods contain folic acid?**

Folic acid is found naturally in many healthy foods. Sources include asparagus, broccoli, brown rice, Brussels sprouts, chickpeas, lentils, liver, oranges and orange juice, peas, pork, poultry, shellfish, spinach, wheat bran and other whole grain foods. It is also present in fortified foods such as breakfast cereals.

As folic acid is a water-soluble vitamin, it is easily lost during cooking. Steaming or microwaving vegetables and avoiding boiling and overcooking them will help to reduce this loss.

## **What is the treatment for folic acid deficiency?**

All patients should improve their dietary intake of folic acid as above. Most causes of folic acid resolve eventually or respond well to treatment which is most easily provided by a short 4 month course of folic acid tablets. Your doctor will have checked your vitamin B12 levels first to ensure that folic acid tablets are the most appropriate treatment for you, hence why we have issued this prescription.

## **Do I need any follow-up?**

We will often recheck your folic acid and vitamin B12 levels between 2 and 4 months after a course of treatment. Should you not respond to treatment, further assessment or investigation may be required. Going forward, we encourage all patients to eat well and adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

## **I have more questions?**

Feel free to book a telephone appointment with your usual doctor if you wish to discuss any of the above.

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