

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Folate is a chemical that you need for healthy cell growth and function. It's also needed for making red blood cells.

Folate is found in foods such as dark green leafy vegetables, eggs, dairy products, liver, Brussels sprouts, potatoes, chickpeas, nuts, beans, and poultry. It's also added to some breakfast cereals, flours, and breads.

You can also take folate as a supplement in tablet or capsule form.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Folate is used to:

- Treat Alzheimer's disease (disease that affects memory and mental functioning)
- Prevent cancer
- Prevent heart disease
- Prevent certain birth defects

Folate also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

Folate that you get from food is safe. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking supplements or higher amounts of folate. Supplements are stronger than folate you get from food. They can also interact with some medications and affect how they work.

For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

It's generally safe to eat foods that are rich in folate. Talk to your doctor before taking supplements.

What else do I need to know?

- Talk to your healthcare provider before taking folate supplements if you're taking methotrexate (such as Rheumatrex[®] Trexall[®]) as part of your cancer treatment or treatment for autoimmune diseases. Folate can make this medication less effective.
- Talk to your healthcare provider before taking folate supplements if you're taking medications such as phenytoin (Dilantin[®]), carbamazepine (Carbatrol[®], Tegretol[®], Equetro[®], Epitol[®]), or valproate (Depacon[®]) to treat epilepsy (seizure disorder). Folate can affect the way these work in the body.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Folate - Last updated on May 18, 2023

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