2026 CDC NUTRITION REPORT

Folic acid fortification: A public health success

Background

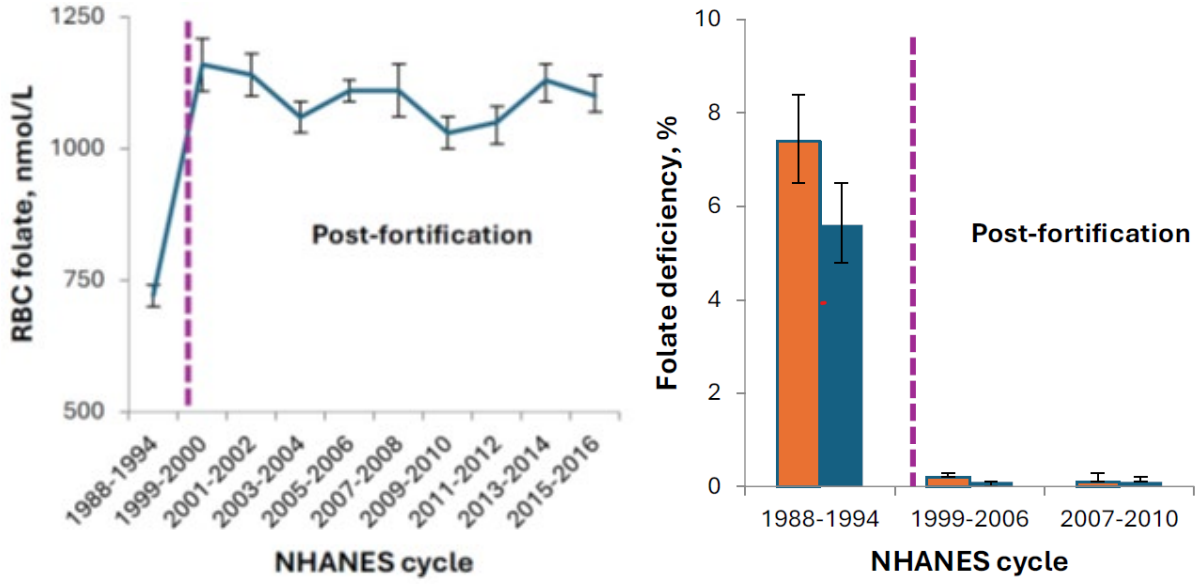
It is important for people to have enough folate in their bodies during pregnancy, infancy, and other periods when cells rapidly divide and grow. To reduce the risk of neural tube defects in newborns, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires folic acid to be added to all enriched cereal-grain products.

Red blood cell folate reveals how much folate is stored in the body and is a good sign of long-term folate status.

Intake recommendations

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommend that every woman who could become pregnant consume at least 400 micrograms of folic acid each day in addition to folate they receive from food in a varied diet.

U.S. blood folate levels increased post-fortification



Legend: Both graphs show data for the U.S. population 4 years and older for 1988-1994 and 3 years and older for other NHANES cycles. Orange bars represent the prevalence of red blood cell folate deficiency, whereas blue bars represent the prevalence of serum folate deficiency (right graph). RBC, red blood cell.

Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1988-1994 to 2015-2016.

U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

In 1998, the FDA began requiring folic acid to be added to enriched cereal grain products to reduce the risk of neural tube defects. After 1998, blood folate levels increased by about 50% in the overall U.S. population (left graph). Before 1998, about 6–8% of the overall population (right graph) and 10–12% of women of reproductive age (not shown) did not have enough folate. After 1998, that figure dropped to less than 1% both in the overall U.S. population (right graph) and in women of reproductive age (not shown) for all races and Hispanic origin groups.

Additional information about folic acid is available at http://www.cdc.gov/folic-acid/.

The 2026 Nutrition Report provides:

- Nutritional biomarker information for dietary supplement users and non-users
- Reference information for physicians and scientists to detect high or low nutrient levels in people
- A look at nutrient levels over time to see trends in nutrition status
- Numbers that can be used to compare the effectiveness of nutrition interventions