



# Grains of truth about FOLIC ACID CONSUMPTION

## The role of whole wheat and fortified grains

Studies continue to substantiate the health benefits associated with the B vitamin folic acid. Consuming this important wonder vitamin has been linked with reducing the risk of heart disease, colon cancer, Alzheimer's, dementia, and pancreatic cancer. Folic acid also protects against neural tube defects in babies, and reduces the risk of breast and cervical cancer in women.

Unfortunately, 89 percent of dietitians do not believe that women, ages 25 – 54, get enough folic acid<sup>1</sup> and another study, conducted by the Women and Infants Hospital in Providence, R.I., shows that 65 percent of the women they surveyed had never received folic acid counseling<sup>2</sup>. Men can also benefit from folic acid consumption, and health professionals are the key to helping both women and men by providing folic acid education.

### Why eat grains?

Leafy dark green vegetables, legumes, many fruits, whole grains and fortified grains, and cereals contain folic acid or natural occurring folate. USDA reports that grain products provide the largest folate source in the U.S. food supply at 33 percent<sup>3</sup>. No wonder the government chose grain products for enrichment and fortification. Americans not only enjoy them, but grains are abundant, which makes them economical and accessible.

The U.S. government also understands the importance of folic acid, and took an important step by mandating that folic acid be added to enriched flour and grain foods in 1998. Foods that can be fortified with folic acid are enriched flours, breakfast cereals, corn grits, infant formulas and medical and special dietary foods approved by FDA. Current FDA regulations prohibit the fortification of whole grains, though some whole wheat products are now being fortified with folic acid, calcium and fiber.

In 2002, a study showed that neural tube birth defects have decreased by 23 percent following folic acid fortification<sup>4</sup> and in Nova Scotia by 50 percent between 1998 and 2000.

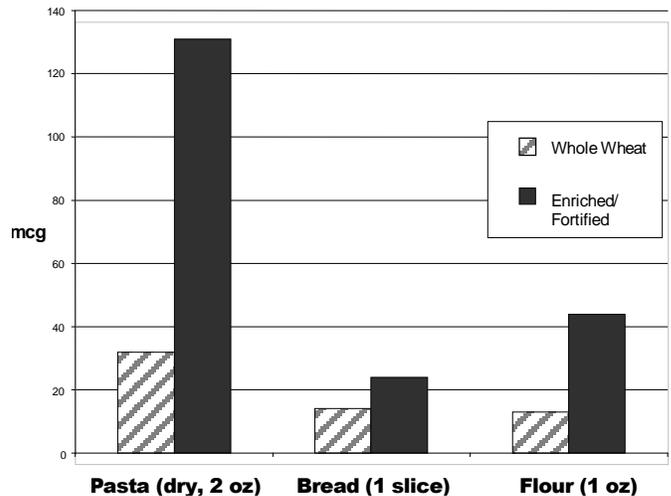
### Achievable outcomes include grains

Easy-to-use information that is clear and specific will encourage behavior change, and fortified grain foods are the solution health professionals need to get clients to consume more folic acid. Fortified grain foods are acceptable to consumers, economical, and easy to find.

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Although consumers are often confused and sometimes falsely believe grains are fattening, there are few barriers to grain food consumption.

Folic Acid in Wheat Foods



The Wheat Foods Council recommends that health professionals encourage consumers to eat a wide variety of enriched/fortified grain products. Although whole grains should be encouraged for other health benefits, the best sources for folic acid consumption in grain foods come in the form of enriched/fortified grain products and cereals. Grain products, which contain fortified folic acid, include; all-purpose, unbleached, cake, and white bread flours; white bread(contains twice as much folic acid as whole wheat bread); wheat breads (due to white flour content); pastas (using fortified flours); tortillas; crackers; ready-to-eat cereals; and baked sweet goods such as cakes, cookies, and pies. Make sure the label says, "enriched."

<sup>1</sup> R.D. Survey conducted by the Wheat Foods Council in Denver, Colo., October 2000.  
<sup>2</sup> Frishman et al., Journal of Reproductive Medicine, December 2001.  
<sup>3</sup> Vetter, James, Milling & Baking News, January 22, 2002.  
<sup>4</sup> Honein, Margaret et al., Journal of the American Medical Association, June 2001.



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