



## **The Health Supplements Information Service reiterates the need for Folic Acid supplementation**

11<sup>th</sup> October 2010. In response to a paper on folic acid and cardiovascular disease studies published this week<sup>1</sup>, The Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) would like to make the following comment:

“It is vital to point out that folic acid which is a B vitamin is essential for normal blood formation, homocysteine metabolism, function of the immune system, cell division, plus for maternal tissue growth during pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Intakes of this very important nutrient are lower than recommended in significant proportions of the UK population and a supplement containing this vitamin can help bridge this dietary gap. Moreover, folic acid supplements are recommended by the Food Standards Agency for women planning a pregnancy and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

“Turning to the study, it was a meta-analysis of eight previously published trials evaluating folic acid supplementation and its effect on lowering blood homocysteine levels for the prevention of cardiovascular disease. **It is therefore not a new supplementation trial but an analysis of trials already conducted. It is also important to note that many patients in these trials were already at cardiovascular risk.**

“The meta-analysis included a total of 37,485 participants, 18,723 of whom were assigned to take folic acid in doses ranging from 0.8 milligrams per day to 40 milligrams per day, all of which are above the Recommended Daily Amount (RDA). The other 18,762 took placebo or an equivalently small dose of folic acid. Trials continued for an average of five years.

“Overall, there was a 25 percent reduction in homocysteine levels associated with active folic acid supplementation. There was no difference reported in the proportion of people

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<sup>1</sup>*Arch Intern Med.* 2010;170[18]:1622-1630

<sup>2</sup> European Food Safety Agency. Scientific Opinions on the Substantiation of Health Claims for folic acid. October 1 [http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa\\_locale-1178620753812\\_1211902907948.htm](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1211902907948.htm)

who had a major heart or blood vessel event, stroke, cancer or who died between those who took folic acid and those who took placebo. **This analysis found no harm in folic acid supplementation.**

“As many people are missing folic acid from their diets and the government recommends women planning a pregnancy and mums-to-be should ensure adequate folic acid levels daily, this meta-analysis should not be used to dilute or discourage such key recommendations.”

**- ENDS-**

The Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) ([www.hsis.org.uk](http://www.hsis.org.uk); Tel: 020 7052 8955) is an independent information body, set up to provide balanced information on vitamins and minerals. It is supported by a restricted educational grant from the Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB).

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