

### **FOLIC ACID AND B VITAMINS**

In response to a paper<sup>[1]</sup> set to be published (5<sup>th</sup> November 2008 issue) in the Journal of the American Medical Association, regarding Folic Acid and B vitamin supplements<sup>[2]</sup>, the Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) would like to make the following comment:

Pamela Mason, spokesperson for HSIS notes:” First of all it is vital to point out that Folic Acid is a B vitamin, which is essential to health. Folic acid is critical for every single process in the body that requires cell division. It is especially important in foetal development and helps to produce key chemicals for the brain and nervous system.

“The study set to be published in the Journal of the American Medical Association was part of the Women’s Antioxidant and Folic Acid Cardiovascular Study that involved 5,442 US female health professionals aged 42 years or older at high risk of cardiovascular disease. The women were randomly assigned to receive either a daily combination of folic acid 2.5mg, vitamin B6 50mg and vitamin B12 1mg or a matching placebo for 7.3 years.

“The study found that compared with the placebo group, women overall receiving the B vitamins had no greater risk of developing total invasive cancer, breast cancer, or any cancer death. There were no differences according to current use of multivitamins, intakes of total folate, vitamin B6 and vitamin B12 or cancer at baseline.

“However, a significantly reduced risk of cancer was found for total invasive cancer and breast cancer among women aged 65 years or older at study entry but no reductions in risk were observed among younger women (40-54 years or 55-64 years).”

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Pamela continues. "It is important to note that this study has shown that Folic Acid is associated with reduced risk of cancer in the older women in the study and no change in cancer risk in the women overall. There is also evidence from animal studies and population based studies that folic acid is associated with reduced cancer risk."

Pamela adds: "Bearing in mind how essential folic acid is to our overall health, and the fact that many women's intakes, particularly those of reproductive age, fall below Department of Health recommendations, it is important that the public continue to be aware of this essential nutrient as indeed all vitamins and minerals - and that failing appropriate dietary intake, which should always be the aim, a supplement can make up the dietary gap. "

**[1] Journal of American Medical Association. Zhang SM et al. 4 November 2008 | Volume 300;2012-21**

**[1] The levels used in the study for folic acid and vitamin B6 are considerably higher than the recommended daily allowance (RDA) and for the Upper Safe Limits. Nutritional supplements are manufactured and sold at much lower levels than used in the study.**

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