

## **The Importance of Sufficient Folate**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Folates play a key role in disease prevention, with low folate status associated with increased risk for neural tube defects (such as Spina bifida), cardiovascular disease and stroke, some cancers such as colorectal and colon, and dementia. The first part of this presentation will discuss the current dietary recommendations for reducing the risk of neural tube defects and potential ways in which folate intakes can be increased in the general population.

Folate bioavailability is a major determinant of nutritional status especially when folate intakes are in the marginal range. This can be a problem in countries where folic acid fortification is not currently permitted. Results from the current EU FolateFuncHealth project (QLK1-1999-00576) will also be presented to show that the bioavailability of natural food folates may be higher than current estimates.

The second part of the presentation will discuss the role of homocysteine and vascular diseases in relation to folates. Results will be presented from a large human study being conducted in the EU folate project to show that similar significant reductions in plasma homocysteine can be achieved in individuals with high initial homocysteine concentrations using both dietary and supplementation strategies.

The final part of the talk will raise several important research questions for further debate.