

# Folate

Folate and vitamin B12 are two tests that are often used together to help diagnose anemia, neuropathy, and monitor the treatment of vitamin B12 or folate deficiency.

## What is folate?

Folate and Vitamin B12 are both from the B complex of vitamins. They are necessary for the formation of normal red blood cells, the repair of tissues, and synthesis of DNA, the genetic material in cells. Since both are nutrients that cannot be produced in the body, they must be supplied by fortified foods and dietary supplements. Folate is also an important nutrient in pregnant women for proper fetal development.

## What is the difference between folate and folic acid?

Folate is the natural occurring form of the vitamin while folic acid refers to the man-made supplement that is added to food and drinks, but both have the same effects. Folate is found naturally in leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, dry beans and peas, liver, and yeast.

## When do I need a folate test?

It is important for pregnant women or women who plan to become pregnant to check their folate levels in order to reduce the risk of birth defects.

Testing for folate and B12 levels may also be appropriate when a person shows signs of:

- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Pale skin
- Sore tongue and mouth
- Fatigue or muscle weakness
- Rapid or irregular heart beat
- Confusion or forgetfulness

## What should I do if my results are abnormal or out of range?

It is always recommended you meet with a healthcare provider to determine what your laboratory test results mean to you. Your healthcare provider will review all of your test results and, combined with your health history, will be able to provide an accurate picture of your health status.

**If any of your results were abnormal or out-of range:** A low folate level in a person with signs and symptoms likely indicates that the person has a deficiency, but does not necessarily reflect the severity of the anemia or associated neuropathy. Additional tests are usually done to investigate the underlying cause of the deficiency in order to properly treat the condition.

**If your results were within normal range:** A normal folate level may indicate you do not have a deficiency and that the signs and symptoms are likely due to another cause. You should share your results with your healthcare provider, who may request additional testing to determine the cause of your symptoms.

## What other resources are available to learn more about my health and laboratory tests?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)
- Lab Tests Online: [labtestsonline.org](http://labtestsonline.org)
- WebMD: [webmd.com](http://webmd.com)

*DLO Direct offers direct access to laboratory testing for informational purposes. A DLO Direct lab test result is not a medical diagnosis and is not intended as medical advice. Only a healthcare provider can interpret lab results and diagnose a medical condition or disease.*

*Because tests have not been ordered by a healthcare provider, third party entities, including Medicare and Medicaid, will not reimburse for these tests.*

## FASTING REQUIRED

Fasting is required for a folate test. Please DO NOT eat or drink anything except water for 8-12 hours before your test. DO NOT stop taking your prescription medications. If your healthcare provider advised you to take your medication with food, consult with your healthcare provider before fasting.



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