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Despite some recent conflicting evidence regarding folic acid intake and the risk of colorectal cancer, a new study with a large population and long follow-up confirms that higher folic acid intake is associated with a lower risk of colorectal cancer.

PRE- AND POSTFORTIFICATION INTAKE OF FOLATE AND RISK OF COLORECTAL CANCER IN A LARGE PROSPECTIVE COHORT STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

Previous research has indicated that high folate intake may be associated with a decreased risk of colorectal cancer. However, some recent evidence suggests that excessive folate supplementation may actually increase colorectal cancer risk in some individuals.

In a new study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers sought to determine whether the mandatory folic acid fortification of grain products in the U.S. has had unintended negative consequences regarding cancer risk.

We examined the association between folate intake and colorectal cancer risk, including 8.5 y of postfortification follow-up.

Scientists examined the association between folate intake and colorectal cancer in the NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study—a U.S. study that included 525,488 individuals aged 50–71 years. The study was initiated in 1995–1996 and included 8.5 years of post-fortification follow-up. Dietary, supplemental, and total folate intakes were calculated for the pre- and postfortification periods (before and after 1 July 1997).

In the post-fortification analysis, a higher total folate intake was associated with a decreased colorectal cancer risk. In comparison to the low folate intake group (<200 µg/day), individuals with intakes in the highest group (>900 µg/day) had a 30% lower risk of colorectal cancer. When intakes were analyzed specifically from supplements, there was a 18% reduction in risk in the group with the highest intake. The group with the highest dietary intake also had a significant reduction in risk (19%).

The relationship between folic acid intake and risk reduction was similar for the prefortification period. The researchers observed no significant differences between time periods (pre- and post-fortification).

Although additional follow-up time may be necessary to fully assess the effect of folic acid fortification, in this large prospective study folate intake was associated with a significant decrease in colorectal cancer risk.

Todd M. Gibson, et al Pre- and postfortification intake of folate and risk of colorectal cancer in a large prospective cohort study in the United States Am J Clin Nutr October 2011 vol. 94 no. 4 1053-1062.