

For Immediate Release

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INCREASED EMPHASIS ON WHOLE GRAINS COULD PUT PREGNANT WOMEN AT RISK

Consumption of Enriched Grains Reduces Risk of Folic Acid Deficiency

WASHINGTON, DC (December 23, 2009) - It's hard to turn on the television, stroll through the supermarket, or even pick up a magazine without finding some reference to this decade's nutritional darling: whole grains. With the public's increased recognition of the benefits of fiber, whole grains are at the top of most nutritionists' healthy foods list – and rightfully so. But some experts caution that the increased emphasis on whole grain consumption – and the current trend of shunning “white carbs” – could be fueling future nutritional deficiencies.

“It's important to include whole grains in the diet, but not at the expense of enriched grains,” notes Sarah Wally, a registered dietitian with the National Pasta Association. “Enriched grains like pasta, white rice and many breakfast cereals are fortified with folic acid – a B vitamin that is essential during early pregnancy for reducing certain birth defects.”

With so few Americans getting adequate amounts of the B vitamin through natural food sources like broccoli, spinach and lentils, avoiding enriched grains puts women who may become pregnant at a clear disadvantage, Wally says. Although whole grains do provide folate (the natural form of folic acid), enriched grains provide double the amount per serving.

According to the March of Dimes, fewer than 40 percent of women of childbearing age are taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid. Although the mandatory fortification of enriched grains with folic acid – ordered by the Food and Drug Administration in 1998 – has notably reduced the incidence of neural tube defects like spina bifida, some health experts worry that the current trend of encouraging all whole grains could negatively affect this progress.

“It's about striking a balance between whole and enriched grains,” Wally says. “Women of childbearing age, who are not getting the recommended 400 micrograms of folic acid per day through a multivitamin or by eating folate-rich foods, should include enriched grains in their diets.”

In recognition of National Folic Acid Awareness Week (Jan 4-11), the National Pasta Association is offering economical, family-friendly [pasta recipes](#) that deliver a delicious source of folic acid. A serving of dry enriched pasta supplies about 25 percent of the recommended daily intake. When paired with folate-rich foods like black beans and spinach, a pasta meal could easily supply nearly three-quarters of your daily folic acid requirements.

For more information on the benefits of pasta, please visit www.ilovepasta.org

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