**Eating strawberries and blackberries could help narrow the UK folate gap**

The UK is currently experiencing a folate gap, particularly in woman of childbearing age, whereby people are not getting enough folate in their diet.

Folate, also known as vitamin B9 is an important water-soluble vitamin that needs to be obtained from the diet to support good health.[[1]](#footnote-1) Folate status has been linked to cardiovascular and cognitive wellbeing and has a crucial role to play in women of childbearing age and early pregnancy – helping to facilitate cell division, with shortfalls being linked to the risk of spina bifida (known as neural tube defects).\*1

New Research in the *Food Chemistry[[2]](#footnote-2)* journal has carried out a novel experimental analysis measuring the total folate levels of berries. Scientists found that **berries are excellent providers of folate with strawberries and blackberries providing the highest amounts of total folates – 93-118 µg per 100 grams which is just a quarter of a typical punnet.**

Recent data from the UK National Diet and Nutrition survey[[3]](#footnote-3) shows that blood folate levels have dropped over the last nine years. Dietary guidelines[[4]](#footnote-4) advise men and women aged 15 to 64 years to aim for 200 µg of folate daily. It is recommended that women of child bearing age take a 400μg folic acid supplement daily until the 12th week of pregnancy. If there is a family history of conditions like neural tube defects, a higher dose of 5mg of folic acid each day may be needed until the 12th week of pregnancy.[[5]](#footnote-5)

At the moment, daily intakes of folate from food sources average just 193 µg for girls aged 11 to 18 years and 205 µg amongst women of childbearing age (16-49 years) with around 1 in 10 (8%) having intakes below the Lower Reference Nutrient Intake (level below which deficiency may occur).[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Dr Emma Derbyshire, Public Health Nutritionist and adviser to British Summer Fruits commented**~~: “~~This is a highly informative analysis showing that strawberries and blackberries can provide good levels of folate.

“These findings support the advice that berries should be a “go to” food for young girls and those of child bearing age. However, it must be emphasized that those who could fall pregnant or who are in the early stages of pregnancy should also take a 400 µg folic acid supplement in line with Government advice”.4

1. [Ebara S](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Ebara%20S%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=28603928)(2017) Nutritional role of folate. Congenit Anom (Kyoto).57(5):138-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Zou Y](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Zou%20Y%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30409571)*et al.* (2019) [Quantification of polyglutamyl 5-methyltetrahydrofolate, monoglutamyl folate vitamers, and total folates in different berries and berry juice by UHPLC-MS/MS.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30409571) [Food Chem](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed) 276:1-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Public Health England (2019) Statistical Summary: National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Years 1 to 9 of the Rolling Programme (2008/09 – 2016/17): Time trend and income analyses. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772430/NDNS_Y1-9_statistical_summary.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Public Health England (2016) Government Dietary Recommendations. Government recommendations for energy and nutrients for males and females aged 1 – 18 years and 19+ years. PHE: London. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (2017) Update on Folic Acid. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/637111/SACN_Update_on_folic_acid.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. # Public Health England (2018) NDNS: results from years 7 and 8 (combined). Data Tables.

   Results of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) rolling programme for 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)