

## Folic Acid Could Prevent Heart Disease

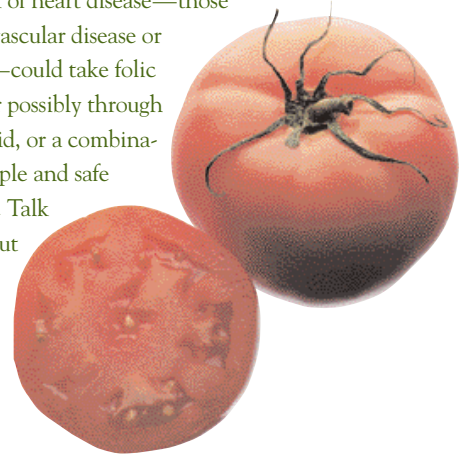
Folic acid, found in citrus fruits, tomatoes and grain products, has been recommended for years for women of childbearing age to avoid birth defects, such as spina bifida during pregnancy. But did you know it also can help your heart? Researchers have found that folic acid can benefit both women and men at risk of heart disease.

According to researchers in the *British Medical Journal*, folic acid could dramatically reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes if levels of homocysteine were reduced. An amino acid, homocysteine is a building block of protein. Too much of this protein can lead to blockages in the arteries. The researchers concluded that a raised

homocysteine level is a cause of cardiovascular disease, but that homocysteine can be lowered by folic acid.

People at high risk of heart disease—those with existing cardiovascular disease or anyone over age 55—could take folic acid in tablet form or possibly through a diet rich in folic acid, or a combination of both, as a simple and safe means of prevention. Talk with your doctor about what is right for you.

Source: *British Medical Journal*, <http://bmj.com>



## Clearing the Air: Allergy Strategies that Work

Along with the hot sun and humid days, summertime brings with it the dreaded allergy season. More than 60 million Americans suffer from allergies, and as many as 40 million suffer from airborne allergens. Despite their prevalence and the increasing numbers of allergy sufferers, there is still widespread misunderstanding about allergies. Some of the more common myths are addressed below.

**Myth: Growing up around allergens causes allergies.**

**Fact:** The rising prevalence of allergies may be due to an overly sterile environment. There are theories that we should be exposed to some germs and allergens in order to build up immunity to them.

**Myth: Dander and fur are the cause of pet allergies.**

**Fact:** The protein in dried urine, saliva and skin secretions that coat the animal's hair are actually the cause of pet allergies.

**Myth: Synthetic fabrics attract less pollen than natural fibers.**

**Fact:** Wearing natural fibers is a better way to stay allergy free.

**Myth: There never will be a cure for allergies.**

**Fact:** The FDA may soon approve a new drug—known as anti-IgE—that directly controls allergy antibodies. A person with allergies typically has elevated blood levels of IgE.

In order to diagnose an allergy, first find out your family history. Then see your family physician or internist for a physical exam. If needed, seek a referral to an allergist for a series of tests. Drug treatment options include nasal steroid sprays, antihistamines and decongestants. Severe allergies may be treated with immunotherapy, a therapy that involves regular injections of small doses of allergens that help to increase the body's tolerance.

Source: *Cornell University*, [www.med.cornell.edu](http://www.med.cornell.edu)

If you are a woman with a waist larger than 35 inches or a man with a waist greater than 40 inches, you are more likely to develop heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and certain cancers.

Source: *National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases*, [www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)

