DR ELSTEIN'S WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

from the world of health and nutrition

Are We All Getting Too Much Folic Acid?

Folic acid is so vital for the formation of DNA and normal brain chemistry that health authorities have mandated fortification of our foods to ensure that we get enough of it. Essentially the impetus for this has been to prevent nervous system defects in babies, as pregnant mothers might be susceptible to folic acid deficiency.

But there is a potential massive downside to universal folic acid fortification of foods. Excess folic acid can actually interfere with the healthy formation of DNA and disrupt brain chemistry, achieving precisely the opposite effect to that which is desired, especially in those who are lacking another critical brain nutrient, that being vitamin B12. Studies show that in folk who are ageing, having high amounts of folic acid and low vitamin B12 status speeds up mental decline quite significantly. Vitamin B12 is found in eggs, meat and fish. Vegetarians and those who consume healthy amounts of alcohol can be B12 deficient. As we get older it also becomes more difficult to absorb sufficient amounts of vitamin B12 from foods. While folic acid helps prevent the seeding and growth of cancer cells, once these are in the body having extra folic acid actually stimulates cancer cell growth, which is a scary thought.

The other problem is the presence of folic acid in multivitamin supplements. This means that for those who consume healthy amounts of leafy green vegetables (the major source of dietary folic acid), eat bread and cereals (which have added folic acid) and take multivitamin supplements, having too much folic acid is a possibility. This could be harmful.

What's fascinating is that this might not affect all of us. A recent study has shown that the high folic acid, low vitamin B12 scenario does not appear to compromise university students. Therefore it might only start to disrupt our normal biochemistry with ageing.

How do you know if you have excess folic acid and insufficient vitamin B12? You have to get your doctor to do a blood test. It's what I do routinely as part of The Eternal Health Wellness Program assessment (http://www.eternalhealth.org/anti_ageing) and my experience is that this phenomenon is not uncommon.