

Title:

The Missing Ingredient

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Summary:

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I know. I know. Vegetables that are purple are in and you buy your purple passion asparagus farm fresh. None of that stuff that's transported 1250 miles on average from factory farms to reach the produce shelf, exhausted, at your market. Nope. You get the good stuff, organical...

Keywords:

Article Body:

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I know. I know. Vegetables that are purple are in and you buy your purple passion asparagus farm fresh. None of that stuff that's transported 1250 miles on average from factory farms to reach the produce shelf, exhausted, at your market. Nope. You get the good stuff, organically grown, from the farmers market and cook it the only approved, right and correct way; you steam it (according to a recent study in the Journal of the Science of Food). Good.

Then you sample it and it tastes kina good. So, what's missing? Maybe, your chef suggests, you add a little Meyers lemon butter, some French sea salt and imported, fresh ground black pepper. Now it tastes really good, you gourmet with a personal chef. But something's still missing?

Now you read the fine print and find out most of the essential nutrient folate or vitamin B9 is just not all there and whatever was there was lost when you cooked it (according to the USDA). And to make matters worse, it doesn't matter where you bought the asparagus or even if it is purple, white or green. Because the only thing The United States Department of Agriculture knows for sure it

that it probably does not have an adequate amount of folate for you in the first place. Read on.

All right. So folate is colorless, something you cannot taste and it is something you cannot live without. In fact you and I and whatever colored asparagus you're eating have something in common: none of us can live without folate (Andrew D. Hanson, Horticulture Sciences Department, University of Florida, personal communication). By deduction we know that the asparagus made enough for itself, but maybe not enough for you. So how do you know enough of it there or not there?

You don't, period. Science could tell you, but try and find that answer. Of course you could have a nutrient analysis done before cooking and after cooking and you would find out for sure. But that would set you back a lot of lettuce, if you get my drift. And the asparagus would not plate up very pretty and I would quit as your chef.

You say, so what? I knew that was coming. Your life without adequate folate or vitamin B9? If your primary source of folate was asparagus then you could end up putting yourself at risk for a host of devastating health problems. Here's the short list: heart disease, birth defects, retardation of development (in children) and low levels can lead to anemia in adults along with added risk for colon cancer. Oh, your body absolutely needs folate to make new cells and genetic material. Darn details.

But don't throw out the asparagus, yet.

As science built the story of this missing ingredient, study by study, and discovered what happens to us when it is not all there, the Federal Government stepped in to help fix the problem. But first science proved we were not getting enough folate from our natural foods. In fact about 50 or so years ago science proved that food richest in folate is (or was) asparagus, but it is also found in other green leafy vegetables, eggs and beans. All this has been published by the USDA and the FDA. However, in 1998 the Food and Drug Administration began requiring certain grain manufacturers to fortify their foods with folic acid, a synthetic form of folate.

And low and behold folate deficiencies are becoming rare, according to nutritionists (that's what most every licensed nutritionist you can contact would most likely say—contact a few and see).

But the levels of folate in our naturally occurring foods are still too low to sustain our health and we must have our diet fortified or suffer the

consequences. We know this for sure because science has established it beyond doubt and with agreement of the Federal Government. In addition, no less an authority than Harvard University (at Harvard's Department of Public Health) says fresh fruits and vegetables alone cannot provide us with adequate nutrition—we need supplements to fill in the missing ingredients in our foods.

So we now know there are ingredients missing from our foods that were there but are not now and we do not know why: the baseline for getting adequate nutrition from our foods has shifted.

As your chef I recommend it is probably best to eat your asparagus, steamed and sauced along and pop a vitamin supplement rich in folate (a daily dose of 400 to 800 mcgs is recommended by the FDA—check it out with your doctor before you start).

Of course, if you do not like looking for missing ingredients in your foods you can eat some cereal fortified with folic acid and other yummy ingredients.