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The fabric is knitted from a clear polymer of the type used for detergent sachets.

By Roger Highfield
Science Editor

Folic acid 'increases memory in later life'

By Nicks Fleming
Medical Correspondent

Folic acid supplements can significantly improve the memory and brain power of older people, according to a study to be published today.

Researchers found that men and post-menopausal women aged between 50 and 70 who took daily doses had the mental abilities of those almost five years their junior.

The supplements also helped maintain speed of information processing, reactions involving movement and overall brain power. These abilities decline with age, and their loss has been linked to a higher risk of dementia.

Folate, the natural form of synthetic folic acid, is found in broccoli, Brussels sprouts, peas, chickpeas, yeast extract, brown rice and fruit including oranges and bananas.

The research, published in the Lancet medical journal, was led by Dr Jane Durga, from the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands.

Dr Durga said: "Folic acid improves performance in tests that measure information processing speed and memory — domains known to decline with age.

"Trials similar to our own should now be repeated to provide greater insight into the clinical relevance of folic acid to people with mild cognitive impairment, and dementia."

Folic acid supplements were also found to reduce levels of homocysteine, a blood chemical linked to heart disease and dementia. 

Age Concern has warned that increases in thiamin deficiency could have the side effect of masking deficiencies in the vitamin B12 found in meat, eggs and dairy products which could actually cause neurological damage.

"Further research is needed to reach a definitive answer on the benefits, or not, of folic acid," said the charity's director-general Gordon Lishman.