**FOLATE STATUS, VITAMIN B₆ AND LIFESTYLE FACTORS OF FILIPINO WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE RESIDING IN METRO MANILA: A CROSSSECTIONAL STUDY**

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**Background:** Folate is important in preventing neural tube defects (NTDs) while vitamin B₆ has been recognized as an essential micronutrient involved in normal fetal development. Thus, deficiencies of these vitamins may lead to undesired pregnancy outcome. Since many pregnancies are unplanned and NTDs occur early in pregnancy, it is particularly very important that assessment of impaired folate and vitamin B₆ status should be extended to women at pre-pregnancy state. There is no existing data on folate and vitamin B₆ status among Filipino non-pregnant and non-lactating women. **Objectives:** 1. To assess the folate and vitamin B₆ status among Filipino non-pregnant and non-lactating women of child bearing age residing in different cities and municipalities in Metro Manila. 2. To examine the association of some selected lifestyle, dietary, gynecological and other health related factors to folate and vitamin B₆ status of non-pregnant and non-lactating Filipino women. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional sample of 326 apparently healthy non-pregnant, non-lactating Filipino women of reproductive age ranging from 13 to 45 yrs old coming from the 50% of the sampled household of the biochemical component of the 2008, 7th National Nutrition Survey (NNS) conducted by the Food and Nutrition Institute of the Department of Science and Technology (FNRI-DOST) were examined. Serum and red cell folate were analyzed using radioimmunoassay (RIA) while vitamin B₆ was assessed with the use of pyridoxal 5’ phosphate (PLP) using radio-enzymatic assay (REA). Information on selected lifestyle factors, gynecological and health related data were gathered through interviews while food consumption pattern was assessed utilizing two sets of FFQ questionnaires. Univariate and multivariate analysis were performed using STATA and SPSS. **Results:** The prevalence of folate deficiency among participating women was 49.9% based on red cell folate (<175 ng/ml) and 59.8% based on serum folate (<3.0 ng/ml). Close to 63 percent were vitamin B₆ deficient. Women who reportedly used vitamin-mineral supplements have significantly higher geometric mean values of serum and red cell folate as well as of vitamin B₆ with corresponding lower prevalences of abnormal values. On the basis of frequency of food consumption, the study indicated that participants ate less folate-dense foods. The use of vitamin-mineral supplements was the strongest predictor for folate and vitamin B₆ status. Cigarette smoking and coffee consumption were inversely associated with low serum and red cell folate and also low vitamin B₆ but these association disappeared after controlling for other covariates (age, BMI, use of supplement, alcohol, occupation, education). The participants could be marginally deficient already in folic acid and vitamin B₆ and further reduction due to these factors could not be detected.
**Conclusion and Recommendation:** The high percentages of subnormal values of serum and red cell folate indicate an alarmingly high prevalences of folate and vitamin B₆ deficiencies among non-pregnant and non-lactating Filipino women. Some lifestyle factors such as use of supplements and eating of less frequently folate densed food, and other lifestyle factors may affect folate and vitamin B₆ status. Considering the importance of folate and vitamin B₆ in health maintenance it is necessary to emphasize the importance of adequate intake of these vitamins prior to pregnancy to reduce morbidity and mortality due to neural tube defects and other adverse pregnancy outcome.