

HFMA calls for more education as regulation around folic acid flour fortification comes into force

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) has issued a call for more education around supplementation after new folic acid fortification of flour came into force.

Government regulation for the fortification of non-wholemeal flour with folic acid came into force on November 14 but HFMA has raised concerns that while food fortification will help more women increase their daily intake of folic acid, depending on their diet and lifestyle, if bread is their main source, they would need to consume around 10 slices of bread a day to achieve levels recommended to help prevent these birth defects.

England's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, himself welcomed the plans to fortify foods, but also commented that supplementation should still be used.

In the Government press release, he said: "The fortification of flour is a simple and effective way to help to reduce cases of neural tube defects, although it is important that women who are pregnant or intending to become pregnant continue to take folic acid supplements before

and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy."

The regulation has prompted the HFMA to assert that it will continue to push the message that women planning a pregnancy or recently becoming pregnant should continue to use a folic acid supplement at the recommended dose of 400mcg. The HFMA believes that the supplementation message needs to be a continual process and will continue to push that message with government departments and policy makers.

Martin Last, HFMA Director General, commented: "Fortification of flour with folic acid is a step forward in helping to prevent neural tube defects, however, we will continue to encourage the Government for an ongoing education programme to highlight the importance for pregnant women or those planning a pregnancy, to take a supplement of folic acid up to week 12 of their pregnancy."

The HFMA also sees the extensive coverage this story has received as a great opportunity for health food stores to be a key part of the education process, helping women prepare for a



healthy pregnancy.

Theresa Cutts, HFMA PR and Marketing Consultant, added: "Health food stores are often at the heart of the community and get to know their customers well. This is a perfect opportunity for retailers to help educate and inform by talking to customers about the importance of supplementation and the benefits of a healthy diet,

especially when there is such high-profile coverage of the new legislation."

The HFMA says it will continue to monitor the messages coming from Government departments and encourage an ongoing education programme to ensure the importance of supplementation continues to be included in coverage surrounding folic acid.

Scottish business groups frustrated small retailers denied 40 per cent rates discount

News that retailers in Scotland will be denied the 40 per cent business rates discount that similar business continue to receive in England and Wales has been met with frustration.

Health Stores UK says that business groups and traders lobbied the SNP-led Scottish Government ahead of the recent Budget, stressing that funds had been made available specifically for rates relief by the Westminster Government. In the end, Scotland's Finance Secretary, Shona Robison, decided that small retail and leisure

businesses would miss out on the benefits – which will, however, be granted to the majority of Scottish hospitality venues.

FSB Scotland Policy Chair, Andrew McRae, commented: "We welcome the extension of 40 per cent rates relief to the majority of Scottish hospitality venues. However, the refusal to extend the same rates relief to our small retailers and leisure providers is a bitter pill to swallow. The pressures they are facing are exactly the same as those in England and Wales, where relief has continued to be available since July 2022 – the last time such

relief was offered in Scotland."

John McKee, owner of Edinburgh-based Hanover Health, said he was "bitterly disappointed" after the Budget. He added: "Successive governments in Westminster felt the case was made to support smaller businesses in retail, leisure and hospitality in the melange of adverse circumstances we have had to endure since 2020."

McKee told the *Scottish Daily Mail* that rates relief would have been worth £8,000 to his store over two years and would've provided the business with a vital cushion.