

# Healthy Start vitamins and why you need them



HEALTHY  
START

Vitamins for new mums  
and mums-to-be

Vitamin drops  
for the kids



## So what are vitamins anyway?

**Vitamins are essential nutrients that your body needs in small amounts so that it can work properly.**

Even though you can get lots of vitamins from a healthy balanced diet, you still might not get everything you need at certain times in your life – like when you're pregnant, a new mum or a small child. So UK Health Departments recommend that at these times you should take a supplement containing specific vitamins to help make sure you get everything you need.

Read on to find out more about Healthy Start vitamins and the Healthy Start scheme.



## Folic acid



Taking a folic acid supplement before you're pregnant and until the 12th week of your pregnancy is really important because it reduces the chances of your baby being born with a neural tube defect such as spina bifida – a birth defect where the spine doesn't form properly. You should start to take folic acid (400 microgram/day) when you're planning to become pregnant. But if you didn't take folic acid before you conceived, you should start taking it as soon as you know you're pregnant, and carry on until your 12th week of pregnancy. (It's also safe to carry on taking folic acid past the 12th week of pregnancy.)

As well as taking a supplement you should also try to eat plenty of foods containing folate – the natural form of folic acid. Good food sources of folate include broccoli, brussels sprouts, asparagus, peas, chickpeas, brown rice, fortified breakfast cereals and bread.

**Important: If you have a family history of neural tube defects or if you have diabetes you should ask your GP about folic acid as you might need to take a higher dose supplement.**



Healthy Start vitamins contain the recommended daily allowance of vitamins for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children from six months old (unless they are drinking 500ml or more of infant formula milk per day).

**Women's tablets: vitamins C, D and folic acid**

**Children's drops: vitamins A, C and D**

## Vitamin D



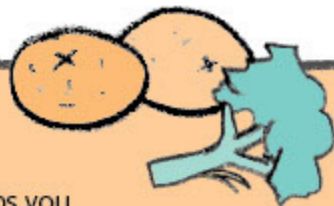
This vitamin regulates the amount of calcium in the body, which in turn keeps bones and teeth healthy. Small children and babies who don't get enough vitamin D can get softened bones which can lead to rickets. It's important that you get enough vitamin D while you're pregnant to keep your bones healthy and to provide your baby with enough vitamin D to support them in their first few months.

While you're breastfeeding, your baby will get vitamin D from breastmilk, so it's important to take a vitamin D supplement during this time. Children from six months to five years are advised to take a supplement containing vitamin D.

Our main source for vitamin D is summer sunlight. The amount of sun you need is different for every person but is less than the amount that causes tanning or burning. You can also find some vitamin D in foods such as oily fish, eggs, fortified margarine and breakfast cereals, but it's difficult to get enough from food alone.

All pregnant and breastfeeding women, particularly teenagers and young women and also young children, are at risk of vitamin D deficiency. People of Asian, African-Caribbean or Middle Eastern origin and those who spend lots of time indoors or who cover up for cultural reasons are also particularly at risk.

## Vitamin C



Also known as ascorbic acid, vitamin C keeps you generally healthy, and it may also help your body absorb iron. The body can't store vitamin C, so you need to have some every day.

It's found in a wide variety of fruit and vegetables and good sources include peppers, broccoli, brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, oranges and kiwi fruit.

## Vitamin A

**Vitamin A has a number of important functions. It:**

- helps maintain the health of skin and mucus linings (like in your nose for example)
- helps strengthen immunity from infections
- helps vision in dim light.



Good food sources include cheese, eggs, oily fish (such as mackerel), milk, fortified margarine and yoghurt.

Vitamin A isn't included in the women's tablets, as too much vitamin A (retinol) while you're pregnant can be harmful to your developing baby. If you're expecting you also shouldn't eat or drink liver and liver products such as fish liver oil, which are too high in vitamin A for you at this time.

# How do I get Healthy Start vitamins?

Pregnant women, women with a baby under one and children from six months to four years who receive Healthy Start vouchers can also get Healthy Start vitamins. There is a green coupon on every second voucher letter that you'll need to show to get your free vitamins. To find out where you can collect them locally just ask your midwife or health visitor.



If you're not on the scheme, some trusts and boards still offer the vitamins for free or sell them – just ask your midwife or health visitor.

# Want to apply for Healthy Start?

Healthy Start provides free vitamins alongside vouchers that can be swapped for milk, fresh fruit and vegetables and infant formula milk, to women and families on certain benefits or with a low income. To find out more or request an application form call

**0845 607 6823 or visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)**



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