Help pregnant women, new mothers and children get their free Healthy Start vitamins

Can I have some vitamins, please?

Here you are

HEALTHY START

A guide for health professionals in England
WWW.HEALTHYSTART.NHS.UK

NHS
Healthy Start: a better diet plus vitamins for low-income families

Healthy Start is a UK-wide government scheme to improve the health of pregnant women and families on benefits or low incomes.

Healthy Start supports low-income families in eating healthily, by providing them with vouchers to spend on cow’s milk, fruit, vegetables and infant formula milk, underpinned by ongoing advice and information on subjects like breastfeeding and healthy eating.

It also provides pregnant women, new mothers and young children on the scheme with free Healthy Start vitamins, which can reduce the risk of health problems associated with vitamin deficiencies e.g. rickets and spina bifida. Women supported by Healthy Start are entitled to free vitamin tablets during pregnancy and until their child is one year old. Children from six months to four years are entitled to free vitamin drops.
To midwives and health visitors in England

"Healthy Start is an important scheme that can make a real difference to the health of pregnant women, new mothers and very young children in low-income and disadvantaged families. As well as providing vouchers towards the cost of basic foods, the scheme offers specially designed vitamin supplements free of charge. The Healthy Start vitamins meet recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) with regard to supplementation.

Along with folic acid and vitamin C, the Healthy Start vitamins for women contain 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D. Given the potential impact of vitamin D deficiency in babies and young children, getting these supplements to low-income pregnant women is hugely important. The children’s drops also contain 7.5mcg of vitamin D, along with vitamins A and C which are very important for young children.

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA), stated in the Scientific Review of the Welfare Food Scheme that Healthy Start vitamins may be the scheme’s most valuable feature and can help to improve the health of children, pregnant women and new mothers and provide adequate nutrition to help prevent future illness (DH 2002).

Midwives and health visitors are especially well placed to explain just how important vitamins are to women and families. They can also help eligible pregnant women and mothers to get Healthy Start vitamin supplements, alongside the advice and support they give for breastfeeding and healthy eating.

I am therefore very pleased to recommend to you this guide which includes information about Healthy Start vitamin supplements, as well as recommendations from both the SACN and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). I hope that these resources will help everyone working with pregnant women and families with young children to discuss the vitamin supplements, and to understand the importance of incorporating the supply of vitamins into local planning and service delivery."

Dame Christine Beasley
Chief Nursing Officer for England
How you can help

As you work with pregnant women and/or families who may qualify for the scheme, you can make a vital difference. Research shows that if a health professional introduces a beneficiary to the scheme and takes the time to discuss the health benefits, they are more likely to view it as a programme that helps them to work together to improve the health of their children (Department of Health (DH), qualitative research October 2009, unpublished).

Healthy Start vitamins are important because:

- 8% of children under five in the UK don’t have enough vitamin A in their diet (SACN 2008a)
- families in lower-income groups tend to have less vitamin C in their diet (SACN 2008a)
- all pregnant and breastfeeding women are at risk of vitamin D deficiency (teenagers, younger women and those from ethnic minorities are particularly at risk) (SACN 2007)
- over 500,000 women and children currently benefit from Healthy Start vouchers, but very few claim their Healthy Start vitamins.

Who qualifies?

Women more than 10 weeks’ pregnant, and families with children under four years old, qualify for Healthy Start if the family is receiving:

- Income Support, or
- Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, or
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, or
- Child Tax Credit (but not Working Tax Credit unless the family is receiving Working Tax Credit run-on only*) AND an annual family income of £16,190 or less in 2010/11.

Women also qualify for the whole of their pregnancy if they are under 18 when they apply, even if they don’t get any of the above benefits or tax credits.

* Working Tax Credit run-on is the Working Tax Credit received in the four weeks immediately after a person has stopped working for 16 hours or more per week.
What do Healthy Start beneficiaries receive?

**Healthy Start vouchers**

- Pregnant women receive one voucher a week worth £3.10.
- Babies under the age of one get two vouchers a week worth a total of £6.20.
- Each child aged over one and under four receives one voucher a week worth £3.10.

Vouchers are posted out every four weeks. These can be spent in a wide range of participating local shops and greengrocers as well as supermarkets. For a list of shops by postcode, visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk) and use the postcode checker to find local shops.

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**Healthy Start vitamin coupons**

Every eight weeks beneficiaries also receive vitamin coupons, which they can exchange for vitamins in their local area. Their coupons will be valid for women’s tablets and/or children’s drops, depending on their circumstances.

Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) must ensure that arrangements are in place to supply both kinds of vitamin supplements. Maternity units can also supply them if they wish. More information on how to order vitamins and reclaim the cost of those given out through the scheme is available on the Healthy Start website [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)
What's in Healthy Start vitamin tablets and drops?

**Women's vitamin tablets contain vitamins C and D and folic acid**
- Pregnant women or mothers of babies under one getting Healthy Start vouchers also get coupons to claim Healthy Start vitamins for women.

**Children's vitamin drops contain vitamins A, C and D**
- Children under four getting Healthy Start vouchers also get coupons to claim free Healthy Start vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D. Health professionals can recommend that breastfed babies under six months take them if they are concerned about the mother's use of vitamins during pregnancy and/or breastfeeding.
- Growing children don't always get enough of these important vitamins, especially vitamin D as it is mainly derived from the sun's action on the skin. So it's sensible to give all children vitamin drops with vitamins A, C and D from six months to five years old, unless they're drinking 500ml (a pint) or more of infant formula milk a day.
What vitamins are we talking about?

Folic acid
Taking 400mcg (0.4 milligrams) of folic acid both before and up until the 12th week of pregnancy can help prevent Neural Tube Defect (NTD) such as spina bifida – where the spine doesn’t develop properly in unborn babies.

Even if folic acid isn’t taken before conception, it’s worth starting as soon as the woman is aware of the pregnancy, and should continue to be taken until the 12th week of pregnancy. Folate, the natural form of folic acid, can be found in brussels sprouts, asparagus, black-eyed beans, spinach and kale, but it’s very difficult to get enough from food alone. Therefore taking folic acid is important in the early stages of pregnancy and also when trying to get pregnant.

If a mother has already had a pregnancy affected by NTD or has diabetes, she is advised to seek medical advice from her GP.

Recommendation: all women who are trying to get pregnant or who are pregnant should take 400mcg of folic acid each day, up until they are 12 weeks pregnant. Women who have already had a pregnancy affected by NTD or who have diabetes should take 5mg of folic acid each day before the pregnancy and up until 12 weeks of pregnancy. (As recommended by COMA (2000), SACN (2007) and NICE (2008).)
It's the best food there is for my baby

Thanks mum!