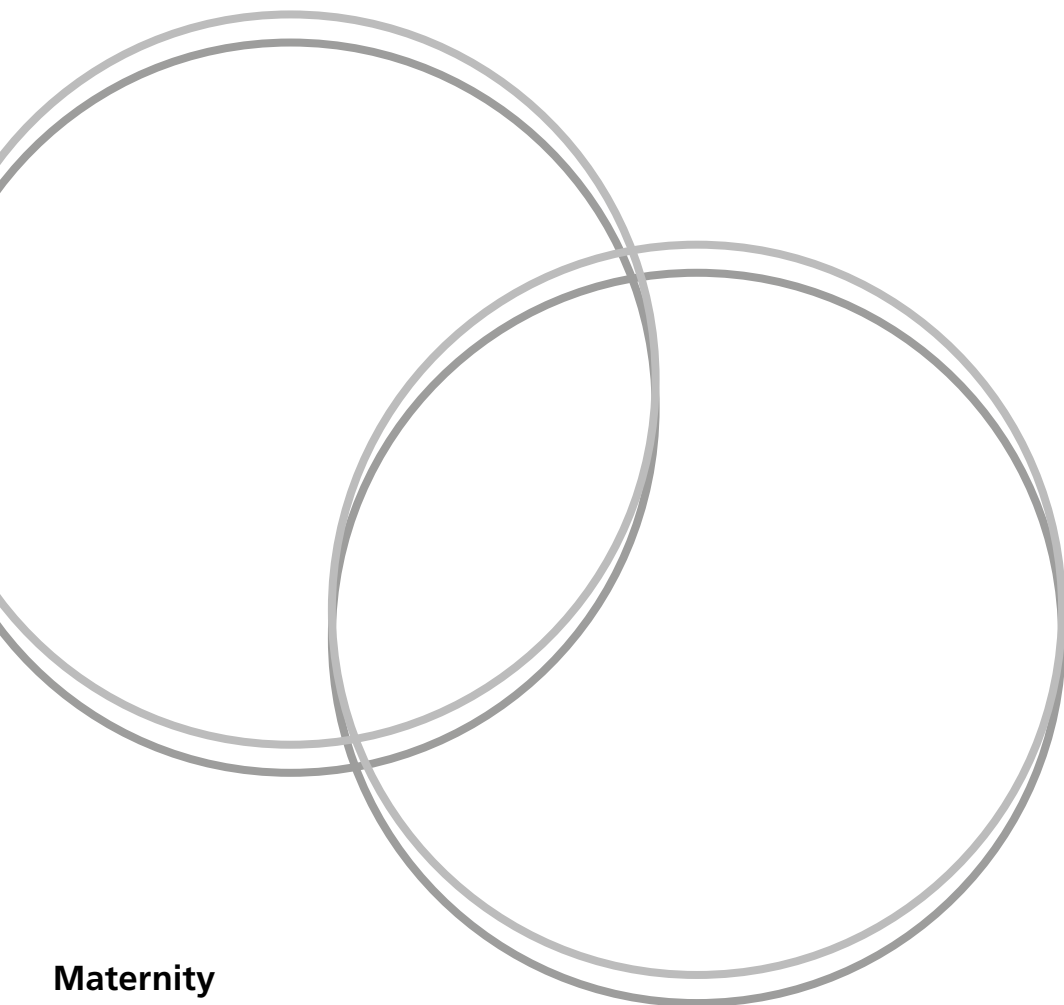


Vitamin D

Information for parents and carers



Maternity

This leaflet has been written to help explain the national recommendations on vitamin D supplements for babies.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is an essential nutrient that helps our bodies use calcium to build and maintain strong bones and teeth.

Our bodies make vitamin D when strong sunlight hits the skin. There isn't much vitamin D in food, including breastmilk.

Why is vitamin D important?

Low levels of vitamin D can cause weak bones, aches and pains, slow growth, muscle weakness, delayed walking, fits (seizures) and problems with the heart.

The most severe form of vitamin D deficiency is a disease called rickets, where bones are so soft they change shape. This also causes pain and weakness.

What are the national recommendations?

Public Health England recommends that, as a precaution to help prevent health problems, all breastfed babies from birth up to one year of age should be given a supplement of 8.5 to 10 micrograms (μg) (sometimes shown as 340-400 international units (IU)) of vitamin D each day.

Babies who drink 500ml or more of infant formula each day do not need vitamin D supplements. This is because infant formula already has added vitamin D.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) also recommends that breastfeeding women take a vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms (400 units) each day, for their own benefit. We would still recommend that your baby has a vitamin D supplement, even if you are taking vitamin D too.

Why is a vitamin D supplement recommended?

The whole UK population is at risk of low vitamin D levels, because our sunlight is not strong enough for our skin to make enough vitamin D, particularly in the autumn and winter months (September to April). There has also been a growing number of cases of rickets in recent years.

Your baby needs vitamin D as a supplement because:

- their skin is very sensitive to the sun and should not be exposed to strong sunlight, particularly without sunscreen
- breastmilk, like most other foods, does not contain much vitamin D
- babies grow very quickly and have a high need for vitamin D, to form strong bones.

Are some babies more likely to get vitamin D deficiency than others?

Some babies are at higher risk of low vitamin D levels, so it is especially important that they receive vitamin D supplements. They include:

- babies with African, Afro-Caribbean, Middle Eastern or Indian ethnic backgrounds (due to darker skin, which absorbs less sunlight)
- babies of mothers who wear concealing clothing (preventing sunlight hitting large areas of skin), which means they may be more likely to be deficient in vitamin D during pregnancy and so won't have transferred as much to their baby before they are born
- babies from multiple pregnancies (such as twins) as the mother's vitamin D has to be shared between the babies
- babies born in the winter months (September to April)
- babies of mothers who are overweight (with a body mass index (BMI) of more than 30), who are more likely to be deficient in vitamin D
- babies of mothers who have gestational diabetes or type 2 diabetes, who are also more likely to be deficient in vitamin D.

How do I get vitamin D supplements for my baby?

Vitamin D supplements are sold in pharmacies, supermarkets, other shops and online.

Preparations for babies should be in liquid form. Check that the preparation you are buying can be used for newborn babies and contains the recommended dose (8.5-10 micrograms, sometimes shown as 340-400 international units).

Examples available include Carlson Baby's Super Daily D3, Baby Ddrops and Fultium Daily D3 drops. There is likely to be an increase in the options available, as manufacturers respond to the new national recommendations. The cost of vitamin D will vary, depending on the product and brand. To compare costs, look at how many doses you will get from the bottle and how long the bottle will last once opened.

'Healthy Start' vitamins for children are available free for babies from low-income families (if you are receiving Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit (if your family take home pay is below the set threshold)). They are also available for sale. They contain vitamin A and C, as well as vitamin D.

Some babies (such as premature babies) may also be prescribed multivitamins, such as Dalivit or Abidec.

Do not give your baby vitamin D supplements as well as multivitamins, as this may cause them to have too much vitamin D, which could cause health problems. If you are not sure what to do, check with a neonatal doctor or neonatal nurse whilst you are in hospital, or speak to your GP or pharmacist.

How do I give vitamin D supplements to my baby?

The number of drops or amount of liquid needed is different for each product and depends on the age of your baby. Read the product instructions carefully and ask your pharmacist for advice if needed.

Liquid forms of vitamin D can be dropped onto the breast (on or next to the nipple) just before a feed, given with a dropper, or on a sterilised spoon with the baby in an upright position. Check the product for instructions on how it can be given. When your baby is old enough, the liquid can be mixed with their food.

Further information

NHS information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d

Information about 'Healthy Start' vitamins, including how to get them:

www.healthystart.nhs.uk

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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