



Healthy Start – Briefing Sheet for Pharmacy Staff



Healthy Start Key Messages

What is Healthy Start?

Healthy Start is a government scheme which aims to help children have a healthy start in life. It supports pregnant women and families with babies and young children who are on benefits, and pregnant under 18 year olds, by providing vouchers which can be used to buy fresh fruit, vegetables, fresh milk and formula milk. Vouchers are sent to recipients monthly through the post.

Healthy Start also provides coupons which can be exchanged for women's and children's vitamins locally. The coupons are attached to the vouchers they receive in the post.

Why do pregnant women and new mums need more vitamins?

Even if you eat a healthy balanced diet before and during pregnancy, you might not be getting enough vitamins through diet alone – for example the main source of vitamin D is the sun and in the UK it can be difficult to get enough!

Healthy Start vitamins can help ensure pregnant and women with children under one get all of the extra nutrients they need. Healthy Start women's vitamin tablets contain folic acid and vitamins D and C.

The Department of Health recommends that **all** pregnant women and those with children under 1 take folic acid, vitamin D and vitamin C. Healthy Start provides these free to those on the scheme.

Why do babies and young children need more vitamins?

Growing children don't always get enough important vitamins as they don't always eat a varied diet and some vitamins such as Vitamin D (which mainly comes from the sun's action on skin) are

difficult to get through food alone. So it's sensible to give **all** children Healthy Start vitamin drops with vitamins A, C and D from six months up until their fourth birthday, unless they are drinking 500ml or more of infant formula milk per day.

Again, Healthy Start provides these vitamins free to children on the scheme.

Vitamin deficiencies are a problem for many mums and small children in the West Midlands. Vitamin D deficiency can result in rickets – a condition where the bones become weak and soft. There are a rising number of reports of rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults. This is of particular concern for all pregnant and breastfeeding women, black and ethnic minority groups and those with limited sun exposure (for example those who are confined indoors or cover their skin for cultural reasons).

Healthy Start is designed to help give children the best nutritional start in life by making healthy eating more affordable and providing Healthy Start vitamins to give both mums and babies a boost. If women apply for the scheme as soon as they are 10 weeks pregnant, they could get up to £93 in vouchers during their pregnancy. For a baby's first year they could receive up to £322 in vouchers and children over one and under four years old could get more than £161 in vouchers for each full year they are on the scheme.

For more information about the Healthy Start scheme, please visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Vitamin key messages:

What vitamins are available through Healthy Start?

Two bespoke 'Healthy Start' branded vitamin products are available, which contain amounts of vitamins recommended by the Department of Health and devolved administrations:

- Tablets for women containing vitamins C, D and folic acid
 - Eligible women on the scheme are entitled to free vitamins from 10 weeks of pregnancy until their baby is one year old.
- Vitamin drops for children containing vitamins A, C and D
 - Eligible children are entitled to free vitamins from six months until their fourth birthday
 - Health professionals can decide to give vitamins to children from 1 month if they consider it necessary (e.g. if there is any doubt about a mother's own vitamin D status during pregnancy and breastfeeding)
- Each Healthy Start vitamin bottle has enough vitamins to last eight weeks.

Why do mums and babies need vitamin supplements?

At certain points in your life you need extra vitamins that diet alone may not be able to provide – like when you're pregnant, breastfeeding or a growing child.

Please use the following guidance when giving advice to the target audience:

For women who are pregnant or who may become pregnant:

- Advise all women to take 400mcg of folic acid daily before pregnancy and throughout the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- Advise pregnant women about suitable vitamin supplements to take, such as Healthy Start women's vitamins.
- Offer women receiving Healthy Start vouchers practical advice on how to make use of them to increase their fruit and vegetable intake.

- Offer advice and information about the benefits of taking vitamin D during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.
- Check that women at the greatest risk are following the advice: those who have limited skin exposure to sunlight, or who are of south Asian, African, Caribbean or Middle Eastern descent or who are obese.

For mothers and babies:

- Advise mothers about suitable vitamin D supplementation such as Healthy Start women's vitamins.
- Check that women at the greatest risk are following the advice on vitamin D: those who have limited skin exposure to sunlight, or who are of south Asian, African, Caribbean or Middle Eastern descent or who are obese.
- Advise women how to use Healthy Start vouchers to increase their fruit and vegetable intake.

For families and carers of babies over 6 months and pre-school children:

- Offer Healthy Start supplements (vitamin A, C and D) to all children aged from 6 months to four years.
- All children between the ages of 1 to 5 should receive vitamins A, C and D unless they are drinking 500ml or more of infant formula milk per day during this period.

(Recommendations from DH, NICE and the Chief Medical Officer)

How do people get hold of these vitamins?

Every 8 weeks, families will be sent a vitamin "coupon" as part of their usual Healthy Start voucher letter. It will remind them to claim their free Healthy Start vitamin supplements and will specify which supplement should be claimed (women's or children's). There will be one coupon for each member of the family entitled to vitamins.



Who is eligible to be on the scheme?

You qualify for Healthy Start if you're at least 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four years old **AND** you or your family get...

- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance, **or**
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, **or**

- Child tax credit (but not working tax credit unless your family is receiving working tax credit run-on only) **AND** an annual family income of £16,040 or less in 2009/10

You also qualify if you are **under 18 and pregnant**, even if you don't get any of the above benefits or tax credits. Once the baby is born you will continue to qualify if you meet the criteria above.

How does Healthy Start check I qualify?

You qualify for Healthy Start if you receive benefits and tax credits. Healthy Start checks with Job CentrePlus and tax credits to see if people who have applied qualify – so it is REALLY important that when you apply you make sure your tax credits and Job CentrePlus information is up to date, including your address etc – you can do this by calling them.

Tax credits helpline – 0845 300 3900

Job CentrePlus – is a local number, so check the phone book.

What do I get if I'm on the scheme?

You receive vouchers through the post that can be used to buy fresh fruit, vegetables, fresh milk and formula milk.

- If you're pregnant you will receive one Healthy Start voucher (worth £3.10) a week until your baby is born.
- You can get two vouchers a week (£6.20 a week) for the baby's first year.
- You will get one voucher (worth £3.10) for a child aged between 1 and 4 years.
- You will also receive coupons that you can exchange for Healthy Start vitamins for pregnant women and new mums with a baby under one and Healthy Start vitamin drops for children aged between 6 months and four years old.
- You will also receive lots of helpful information about how you can use your vouchers, including recipe ideas, health tips and nutritional advice.

Where can I use the Healthy Start Vouchers?

Lots of places take Healthy Start vouchers, including milkmen, greengrocers, market stalls, chemists, corner shops, major supermarkets and more. You can check online using a post code checker to find out which shops accept them in your area.

Where can I get the vitamins from?

Please refer to local vitamin distribution handout

How do I find out if I'm eligible for the scheme?

You can call the Healthy Start helpline on 0845 607 6823 or visit the website www.healthystart.nhs.uk to find out if you are eligible.

How do I get on the scheme?

You can apply by filling in an application form – either pick one up today, download one from the website www.healthystart.nhs.uk or you can call the Healthy Start helpline on 0845 607 6823. The form needs to be signed by a health visitor or midwife.

**HEALTHY
START**