

Healthy Start Vitamins Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some examples of questions that parents/carers may ask you about the Healthy Start vitamins. If they have any further questions please ask them to talk to their health visitor or midwife.

Who can get the Healthy Start vitamins?

In Islington all pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding, women trying to get pregnant and children from the age of 1 month to 4 years can receive the Healthy Start vitamins for FREE. Once a child turns 4 they can no longer receive the vitamins. This is in line with the national Healthy Start scheme.

Why are Islington, Haringey and Camden recommending that all babies, even those drinking more than 500mls of formula milk, take healthy start vitamins?

There is a high incidence of vitamin D deficiency in our population.. So, unless one is absolutely sure that the mother had plenty of vitamin D stores herself during pregnancy to pass on to her baby, we recommend that all babies start the vitamins from 1 month. It is only if the baby was taking more than 1200ml of formula a day that they would be receiving too high doses of the vitamins in the drops, and then it is actually high doses of vitamin A that are more of concern than vitamin D.

However, it is important that mothers and babies/children only take one type of vitamin drops at a time i.e. if they are taking Healthy Start vitamin drops or tablets, they should not take other vitamin preparations (eg Pregnacare).

Why do breastfeeding mothers need vitamins?

Breastfeeding mothers continue to provide their babies with some vitamin D through the breast milk. We want to make sure that mothers replenish their stores of vitamin D after giving birth.

Why do we need to collect vouchers for the vitamins from some women and not others?

Families who are eligible for the national Healthy Start scheme receive GREEN Healthy Start vouchers which they can exchange for the vitamins. We need to collect these vouchers and record when women have them so Public Health can claim back the money from Department of Health who fund the vitamins for these families.

What do the vitamins contain and what do they do?

Healthy Start **women's vitamin tablets** contain:

Folic acid: reduces the chance of your baby having spina bifida, a birth defect where the spine doesn't form properly

Vitamin C: helps maintain healthy tissue in the body

Vitamin D: helps your body to absorb calcium and so supports your baby's bones to develop properly.

Healthy Start **children's vitamin drops** contain:

Vitamin A: for growth, vision in dim light and healthy skin

Vitamin C: helps maintain healthy tissue in the body

Vitamin D: for strong bones and teeth.

If I and my baby eat a healthy diet do I still need vitamins?

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 – such as when you're pregnant, a new mum or a small child. This is particularly true for Vitamin D, as it is difficult to get enough vitamin D even from a healthy diet – we are intended to get it from sunlight. However, our geographical position in the world, our lifestyles and the diversity of our population mean it is more difficult to get enough vitamin D from sunlight, especially during the winter. So UK health departments recommend that you should take a supplement containing specific vitamins to make sure you get everything you need.

Can a grandparent/carer pick up the vitamins for children?

A carer of the child can pick up the vitamins for the child if they have permission from the parent. They should bring the Healthy Start card with them.

Are Healthy Start vitamins suitable for vegetarians or children with food allergies?

Healthy Start vitamins are suitable for vegetarians and free from milk, egg, gluten, soya and peanut residues.

What about if a woman who is not from Islington wants the vitamins?

Ideally the FREE vitamins are funded only for Islington women, but as this may be hard to track we are happy for you to provide the vitamins to women/families outside of Islington on a one off basis. Camden and Haringey have a similar free scheme, so if they come from those places, please encourage them to access the vitamins locally next time. Public Health will track the number of vitamins given out to non-Islington residents (via the postcode) and if there is a large amount given out then we will work out a new monitoring procedure to track this. Please do not register non-Islington families on to the Healthy Start card scheme.

How do I know if the same families come back to pick up their next supply of vitamins?

In each bottle there is 8 weeks supply. The Healthy Start card scheme means that we can know when families pick up the vitamins, whichever distribution point they choose to use. This also enables us to know whether families are continuing to use the vitamins over the long-term, which is what is needed for good results.