

Vitamin D and folic acid in pregnancy and breast feeding

Why vitamin D is important

Vitamin D is important for good health, growth and strong bones. A lack of vitamin D is very common. Vitamin D is mostly made in the skin by exposure to sunlight. Black and Asian people are more likely to be short of vitamin D because of their darker skin colour. Some foods such as oily fish, meat and eggs contain vitamin D. Shortage of vitamin D can lead to aches and pains and softening of the bones leading to rickets in growing children. Pregnant women and breast feeding mothers need adequate levels of vitamin D to supply Vitamin D to the growing baby. **All pregnant and breast feeding women should take a daily supplement of 10 micrograms of vitamin D.**

Why folic acid is important

Folic acid helps the baby's spine to form properly and prevent a condition called spina bifida. **Pregnant women are advised to take folic acid 400micrograms a day from before the baby is conceived until at least 12 weeks of pregnancy.** Folic acid is safe throughout pregnancy.

Which vitamin supplements should I use?

There are several preparations that combine vitamin D and folic acid. It is important to avoid preparations containing vitamin A which can be harmful in pregnancy,

- 1. Healthy start vitamins for women.** These are available for free for eligible women. To qualify you must be 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under age 4 and get one of the following benefits:
 - 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 has a family income of £16,190 or less

You also qualify if you are under 18 and pregnant even if you are not on any of the benefits or tax credits.

If you think you qualify please speak to a health visitor or midwife who will give you an application form. You can also download an application form and find out more about the scheme at

<http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>. Vitamin vouchers are sent by post every eight weeks and can be exchanged for healthy start vitamins at local children's centres.

- 2. Vitamin tablets from pharmacies, over the counter**

Women who do not qualify for healthy start vitamins will need to buy a suitable supplement with vitamin D 10 micrograms a day, folic acid 400 micrograms a day and no vitamin A. Suitable preparations include:

- **Sanatogen mother to be.** Cost about £5 for 30 tablets
- **PregnaCare original.** Cost about £5 for 30 tablets