

# Vitamin D for children

## 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. Some foods such as oily fish, meat and eggs contain vitamin D. A mild lack of vitamin D may not cause symptoms but can cause aches and pains. A more severe lack in children can cause rickets with bending of the bones. Children are particularly at risk of vitamin D deficiency. People with black and Asian skin types are at high risk of vitamin D deficiency.

## Which children should have vitamin D supplements?

It is recommended that all children receive vitamin D supplements from age 6 months to 5 years. Babies who are breast fed need to receive vitamin drops from 1 month of age if their mother has not taken vitamin D supplements in the pregnancy. Bottle fed babies need not take vitamin D supplements until they are drinking less than 500ml (1 pint) of infant formula a day (as formula milk contains vitamin D). Black and Asian children may need to stay on vitamin D supplements long term.

## Which vitamin supplements should I use?

### 1. Healthy Start Children's Vitamin Drops.

These are available for free for eligible families. 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 children's vitamin drops at local children's centres.

### 2. Vitamin drops purchased from pharmacies, over the counter.

Families who do not qualify for healthy start vitamins will need to purchase the vitamin drops. The recommended products are:

- **Dalivit.** Dosage is 0.3ml a day for babies under 1 year (providing 5 micrograms vitamin D a day) and 0.6ml a day for children 1-18 years (providing 10 micrograms of vitamin D a day). Cost about £8 for 50ml i.e. 80 days at a dosage of 0.6ml a day
- **Abidec.** Dosage is 0.3ml a day for babies under 1 year (providing 5 micrograms vitamin D a day) and 0.6ml a day for children 1-12 years (providing 10 micrograms of vitamin D a day). Cost about £4 for 25ml i.e. 40 days at a dosage of 0.6ml a day.