NHS Ayrshire & Arran

Vitamin D supplementation for mums and young children

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Why is vitamin D important?

Vitamin D is essential for keeping bones strong and healthy. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight and only a small amount from some foods such as oily fish, eggs and some fortified breakfast cereals. In the UK there is not enough sunlight between October and March for our bodies to make vitamin D. This means the whole of the UK population is at risk of low vitamin D levels.

It is now recommended that everyone should take a supplement containing 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D every day, especially during the winter.

Who is at greater risk of vitamin D deficiency?

Research shows that pregnant women, breastfeeding mums, babies and children under five are at greater risk of vitamin D deficiency. Women who wear concealing clothes, those with darker skin types, and babies born to women who are diabetic, or are above a healthy weight, are at even greater risk so it is really important they take a vitamin D supplement every day.

It is recommended that all pregnant women, breastfeeding mums, babies and children under five should take a supplement containing 10mcg of vitamin D every day, all year round.

Vitamin D advice for babies

A newborn baby's vitamin D level depends on their mum's level during pregnancy. A baby's level will be higher if their mum took a vitamin D supplement throughout pregnancy.

As a precaution, the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland recommends that breastfed babies from birth up to the age of one year should be given a supplement containing 8.5 – 10mcg of vitamin D every day.

Babies who are formula fed do not need vitamin D supplements if they are having 500ml or more of infant formula per day, as infant formula already has added vitamin D.

Breast milk is the ideal food for babies; however, just like the rest of the population, it is likely that the baby will need extra vitamin D, due to a lack of sunlight.

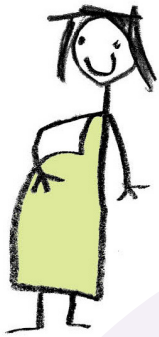
Even though infant formula has added vitamin D, breastfeeding can significantly improve the health of mums and babies and should remain the first choice.

Is a vitamin D supplement needed?

Breastfeeding only	Yes
Infant formula less than 500ml per day	Yes
Infant formula more than 500ml per day	No
Mixed feeding	Yes, if taking less than 500ml infant formula per day

Healthy Start vitamins for women

Healthy Start vitamins give you the vitamins you and your baby need when you're pregnant and help you stay strong and healthy once your baby is born. Healthy Start vitamins contain vitamins C and D, and folic acid. All pregnant women are given free Healthy Start vitamins for the whole of their pregnancy; these are issued by community midwives. Breastfeeding mums are given free Healthy Start vitamins while they are breastfeeding.



On discharge from Ayrshire Maternity Unit breastfeeding mums are given one tub of vitamins, and then given further supplies by their health visitor/family nurse.

Vitamin D drops for children

All children in Ayrshire are provided with free vitamin D drops up until the age of two. Breastfeeding mums are given one bottle of vitamin D drops for their baby when they leave Ayrshire Maternity Unit. When these are finished health visitor/family nurses give breastfeeding mums a further supply at their regular visits.

Parents of formula fed babies will be given a bottle of vitamin D drops at the eight month visit by their health visitor/family nurse. Further supplies will be provided by health visitors/ family nurses at their regular visits.

Vitamin D drops for children contain 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D.

When should I start giving my baby vitamin drops?

If you have taken a vitamin D supplement throughout pregnancy you will have several weeks before your baby's stores begin to go down. Although it is recommended breastfed babies are given a vitamin D supplement from birth as a precaution, in practice, you should aim to start giving drops from around two weeks. Take your time and don't worry.

How do I give my baby vitamin D drops?

Always check the expiry date on the vitamin bottle and do not use them if they are out of date as the vitamins will not be effective after the expiry date.

Follow the advice on the bottle of vitamins and the manufacturer's information leaflet inside the box for the amount of vitamins to give your baby. The number of drops advised should be dropped onto a clean spoon and given to your baby. Vitamin D drops should not be given to breastfed babies in a bottle with water or flavoured drinks or on a dummy.

What about vitamins for my older child?

If you have a child over the age of three, you can buy vitamin D drops from pharmacies, supermarkets and health food shops. It is not necessary to give your child expensive multivitamins.

The most important thing is to buy a supplement with the correct dose of vitamin D and if possible avoid those

containing sugar or sweeteners. Inexpensive suitable examples are:

- Holland & Barrett Baby Vitamin D drops
- Natures Aid Vitamin D drops for Infants and Children
- Vitabiotics WellBaby Vitamin D drops
- Tesco Kids Chewable Multivitamins Plus Minerals
- Abidec Multivitamin drops

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about giving your child vitamin supplements, speak to your midwife or health visitor/family nurse. For further information on Best Start Foods and to find out if you qualify, go to:

https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/

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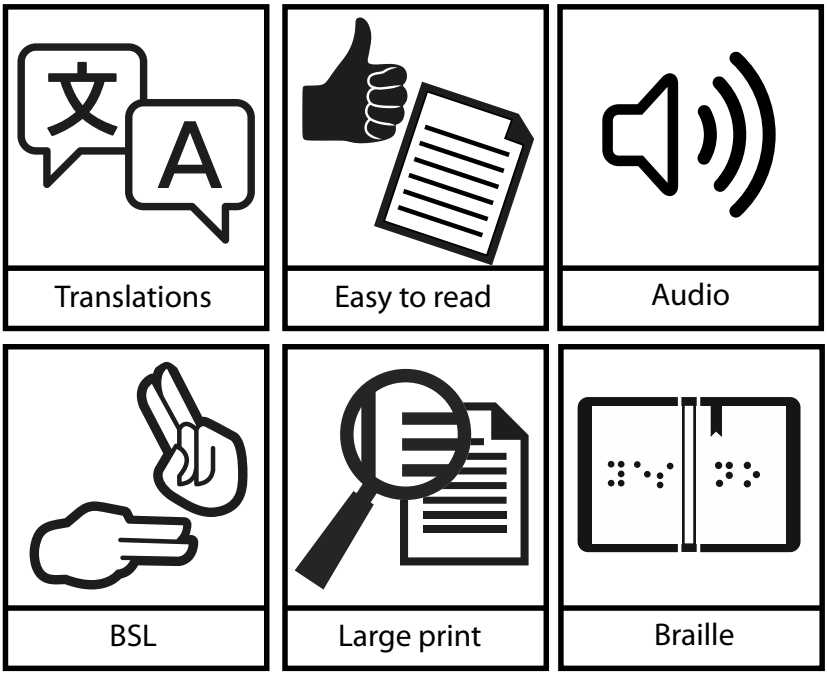

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Last reviewed: July 2026 Leaflet reference: MIS18-136-GD PIL18-0150