

New Vitamin D recommendation information for new parents

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Government

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Throughout life, vitamin D is essential for keeping bones healthy. In Scotland, we only get enough sunlight to make vitamin D during the summer months (April to September). **It is now recommended that everyone in the UK should take a vitamin D supplement daily, particularly during the winter months (October – March).**

Why should we give babies vitamin D drops?

A new-born baby's vitamin D level depends on their mother's level during pregnancy. It will be higher if she has taken a vitamin D supplement during pregnancy. Most of us are able to make vitamin D in the summer sunlight but living and working indoors and using sun creams makes this less likely. Babies are also kept in the shade to protect them from sunburn. Some mothers and babies have a higher risk of vitamin D deficiency including those who wear concealing clothing, those with darker skin types and babies whose mothers are overweight and/or diabetic.

New recommendations

The main UK expert committee on nutrition has recently reviewed the research evidence on vitamin D. Based on their advice, the Scottish Government has updated the recommendations for new-born babies as follows:

- **As a precaution, breastfed babies from birth up to one year of age should also be given a supplement of 8.5 to 10µg vitamin D per day.**
- **Babies who are formula fed do not require a vitamin D supplement if they are having at least 500ml/day, as infant formula already has added vitamin D.**

We are now taking a precautionary approach to protect babies by suggesting that they start vitamin supplements within the first two weeks of birth. This is earlier than the 6 months previously recommended.

We recommend Healthy Start vitamin supplements for pregnant and breastfeeding women and babies. Ask your midwife or health visitor about where you can get Healthy Start vitamin supplements.

Is breast milk low in vitamin D?

No. Breast milk is the normal food for babies but, just like the rest of the population; it is likely that your baby will need a vitamin D supplement as the issue is related to a lack of sunlight in the UK rather than the vitamin levels in breast milk. Even though formula milk has added vitamin D,

breastfeeding significantly improves the health of mothers and children and should remain a priority.

How do I give my baby vitamin D?

Healthy Start vitamin drops for babies contain 7.5µg per 5 drops of vitamin D, as well as vitamin A and vitamin C. The new recommended dose for vitamin D is 8.5-10µg and from October 2018 vitamins will be available containing the recommended dose. In the meantime, you should continue to give the current dosage of 5 drops per day. Although the infants drops say that they are to be given from four weeks of age they are suitable from birth. The community midwife will discuss the use of vitamins after the first week and suggest that you get a supply of the drops to start before the baby is 2 weeks old.

Safety

- Please check the expiry date on the vitamin bottle and do not use if they are out of date as these vitamins will not be effective after the expiry date.
- **You can start with one drop per day to get your baby used to the taste and sensation and then build it up to the recommended 5 drops per day.** If you have taken vitamin D in pregnancy you will have several weeks before your baby's stores are low so take your time and give your baby a chance to get used to them.
- The vitamin drops should be given using the dropper on the bottle provided into the side of your baby's mouth at the level of the lower gums rather than onto the tongue or the back of the throat as this may upset your baby or cause choking. Or you can drop the vitamins onto a spoon and let your baby sip them or gradually spoon them into the side of your baby's mouth.
- Once your baby is used to the taste, the vitamin drops can be 'dropped' onto the breast, near the nipple, so that the baby can swallow the drops whilst breastfeeding. It is not a good idea to start this way as there could be a risk that babies dislike the taste and so reject the breast.
- Vitamin drops should not be given to breastfed babies via a bottle with water or flavoured drinks or on a dummy.

What happens if my baby is formula or mixed fed?

Babies only require a vitamin D supplement if they are taking **less than** 500 mls of formula most days.



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