New Vitamin D recommendation information for new parents

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The whole UK population is at risk of low Vitamin D levels since we mainly get this from sunlight. In Scotland the sun is not strong enough to make vitamin D in the winter months.

It is now recommended that everyone in the UK should take a vitamin D supplement daily

Why should we give babies vitamin D drops?

A new-born baby’s vitamin D level depends on their mother’s level during her pregnancy. It will be higher if she took vitamin D during pregnancy. Most of us are able 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 infants have a higher risk of vitamin D deficiency including those who wear concealing clothing, those with darker skin types and babies of overweight or diabetic mothers.

New recommendations

The main UK expert committee on nutrition has recently reviewed the research evidence. Based on their advice, the Scottish Government has updated the recommendations for new-born babies. We are now taking a precautionary approach to protect babies by suggesting that they start vitamins within the first two weeks of birth. This is earlier than the 6 months previously recommended.

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

Healthy Start vitamins are what we recommend for pregnant and breastfeeding women and infants. You should ask your Midwife or Health Visitor about where you can get your vitamins from locally.
Is breast milk low in vitamin D?
No, breast milk is the ideal food for babies but, just like the rest of the population; it is likely that the baby will need extra vitamin D as the issue is related to a lack of sunlight rather than the breast milk. Even although formula milk has added vitamin D, breastfeeding seriously improves the health of mothers and children and should remain the first choice.

How do I give my baby vitamin D?
Healthy Start Vitamin drops for infants contain 7.5μg/d of vitamin D, as well as vitamin A and vitamin C. The new recommended dose is 8.5-10μg/d and from September 2018 they will be available containing the recommended dose. In the meantime, you should offer the dosage of 5 drops per day recommended on the bottle. Although the current infants drops say that they are to be given from four weeks of age they are suitable from birth on the recommendation of a clinician. 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 the 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 the babies stores are low so take your time and give the baby a chance to get used to them.
- The vitamin drops should be given using the dropper provided into the side of the 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 the baby or cause choking.
- Once the 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 the baby is formula or mixed fed?
Babies who receive infant formula of over 500 mls per day do not require any extra vitamin D until they are taking less than 500 mls a day.