NHS
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Vitamin D

This leaflet explains why Vitamin D is recommended to anyone who is pregnant and/or breastfeeding.

Introduction

Current UK guidance advises anyone who is pregnant or breastfeeding to consider taking vitamin D during autumn and winter. Some people should take it throughout the year. Vitamin D helps keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy and supports the immune system.

Why is Vitamin D important?

A lack of vitamin D can cause bone pain and muscle weakness in adults (osteomalacia). Severe deficiency in babies and children can cause rickets and affect healthy bone development.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, consider taking 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D each day from October to March. Take it throughout the year if you have dark skin or little or no exposure to sunlight. Breastfed babies should receive 8.5 to 10 micrograms daily from birth; formula-fed babies do not need drops while having 500 ml or more of formula a day.

How do we get Vitamin D?

Most vitamin D is made when sunlight reaches the skin. Only a small amount comes from food, so it can be difficult to get enough through diet alone. Sources include oily fish such as salmon, sardines, herring and mackerel, egg yolks, red meat and fortified foods such as some fat spreads and breakfast cereals.

If you are able to, spend short periods in sunlight from late March to September, with small areas of skin exposed, such as your forearms, hands or lower legs. Protect your skin or move into the shade before it turns red or burns. The UK sun is not strong enough for the body to make vitamin D during autumn and winter. People with dark skin or little sunlight exposure should consider a daily supplement throughout the year.

Who might have low levels of Vitamin D?

You may be more likely to have low vitamin D if you:

- Are not often outdoors, for example if you are housebound or spend most of your time indoors
- Usually wear clothes that cover most of your skin when outdoors
- Have dark skin, for example if you are of African, African-Caribbean or South Asian family origin
- Have a health condition that reduces absorption of nutrients, or have had some types of weight-loss surgery

- Take medicines that may affect vitamin D levels; ask your GP, midwife or pharmacist for advice
- Have symptoms of deficiency or have previously been diagnosed with low vitamin D.

Where can I get Vitamin D?

Healthy Start vitamins contain folic acid, vitamin C and vitamin D. You may be entitled to free vitamins if you are pregnant and meet the Healthy Start eligibility criteria. Ask your midwife about local availability or visit: https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/getting-vitamins/

Vitamin D supplements are also available from pharmacies and supermarkets. Check the label: many pregnancy multivitamins already contain 10 micrograms (400 IU). Avoid supplements containing vitamin A (retinol) during pregnancy. If deficiency is suspected or confirmed, your GP or maternity team will advise about testing and treatment.

Where can I get more information?

If you need further information, speak to your midwife, GP, health visitor or pharmacist, or visit:

- NHS: Vitamin D – https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/
- NHS: Vitamins and supplements in pregnancy – https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/pregnancy-vitamins-and-supplements/
- NHS: Breastfeeding vitamins – https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/baby/feeding-your-baby/breastfeeding/healthy-diet-when-breastfeeding/breastfeeding-vitamins/

References

- NICE NG247 (2025): Maternal and child nutrition – recommendations 1.1.10–1.1.14.
- NHS: Vitamin D; vitamins and supplements in pregnancy; breastfeeding vitamins.
- UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative: statement on vitamin D supplementation for breastfed babies.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

A Hlophe, RBFT Snr Midwife, April 2021
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