



Vitamins A, C and D - What are they and why do children and babies need them?

- Vitamins and minerals help us to stay healthy, including babies and children. They also help us when we are ill.
- In the UK, it is known that some babies and children have low levels of vitamins A, C and D.

This parent tip will look at each of vitamins A, C and D, explaining why they are important for babies and children.

Why are vitamins A, C and D important?

	What they do	What vitamins are helpful
Vitamin A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps the immune system to work • Helps with vision • Helps keep skin healthy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin A can help our body fight infections and help us see in dim light
Vitamin C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to protect cells from damage • Helps with the formation of collagen to keep bones, gums, teeth and skin healthy • Helps the immune system work as it should • Helps the body absorb iron 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin C can help prevent scurvy (this is not common in children living in the UK)
Vitamin D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps the body to absorb calcium and helps to keep bones strong • Helps muscles to function normally • Helps the immune system work as it should 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin D can help prevent rickets which is a condition that can cause bones to be weak or not develop properly • Tooth decay • Conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity and osteomalacia in adults

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

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Vitamins A, C and D

Food and vitamins

- Children and babies can get most, but not all, of the vitamins and minerals they need to be healthy from the food they eat. Therefore, it is important to introduce your baby or child to a variety of foods to ensure that they are getting a healthy, balanced diet, to help them grow and develop well.
- Some babies and children can be fussy about what they eat, and it is not always easy to know how much they are eating. For more information about fussy eating, look at the BBC Tiny Happy People section on fussy eating: <https://bbc.in/3rGvH5g>.
- It is recommended that babies and children receive vitamin D supplements, because it is not possible to get all the amount of vitamin D from food. Please see the table below for information about this.
- Your local pharmacy, health visitor or GP can help get the right vitamins for your family.
- Always follow the instructions on the side of the bottle on how much to give your baby or child.

The table below shows which foods are rich in vitamin A, C and D:

	Vitamin A	Vitamin C	Vitamin D
Vegetables	Dark green leafy vegetables such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broccoli• Cabbage• Spinach Yellow and orange vegetables such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carrots• Peppers• Sweet potatoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broccoli• Brussel sprouts• Red and green peppers	
Fruit	Orange-coloured fruits such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apricots• Mango• Melon• Orange• Papaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blackcurrants• Kiwi fruit• Oranges• Tomatoes• Strawberries	
Meat and fish	Oil-rich fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines (limit to twice a week for girls and four times a week for boys and only 2 portions a week when introducing solid foods)		Oily fish - salmon, sardines, trout (limit to twice a week for girls and four times a week for boys and only 2 portions a week when introducing solid foods)
Dairy	Full fat milk, yoghurt, cheese		
Other	Eggs	Orange juice, potatoes	Fortified breakfast cereals, eggs, fat spreads such as margarine

It is difficult to get all the vitamin D needed from diet alone as dietary sources of vitamin D are limited

Vitamin D and sunlight

We get most of our vitamin D from the action of sunlight on our skin between March to September, but it can be difficult for everyone to get enough vitamin D from the sun because:

- Some people are unable to spend enough time outside
- Some people wear clothing that covers most of their skin
- People with darker skin have more melanin, which means it is harder for the skin to make vitamin D
- Following sun safety advice can reduce the amount of sunlight on our skin, however it is important to follow sun safety advice, which is available on the NHS website: <https://bit.ly/3SCWn2b>. Also see iHV Parent Tip 'Staying safe in the sun', available on our website: <https://bit.ly/3vUyAkD>

Different people need different amounts of vitamin D supplements depending on their age or situation. The table below explains the recommended amounts of vitamin D supplements for different people.

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All of these groups are advised to take vitamin D supplements throughout the year	Amount of vitamin D needed a day
Babies	
Babies from birth to 12-months of age who are exclusively breast or chest fed	8.5-10 micrograms
Babies under 12-months of age receiving less than 500mls of infant formula within 24hrs	8.5-10 micrograms
Preterm babies are at risk and require vitamin supplements from birth, no matter how they feed	This will be part of their discharge and your doctor will prescribe the vitamins when your baby is discharged home.
Children aged 1-4-years	10 micrograms
5 years and above	
People who are unable to spend time outside	10 micrograms
People with dark skin such as people from African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin	10 micrograms
People who wear clothing that covers most of their skin throughout the year	10 micrograms
Pregnant or birthing people	10 micrograms
Those who are breast/chestfeeding	10 micrograms

Healthy food and vitamin schemes

Some families are entitled to free vitamins and funds for infant formula, cow's milk, and fruit and vegetables (these can be fresh, dried, tinned or frozen).

England, Wales and Northern Ireland scheme:

- If you live in England, Wales and Northern Ireland this is called the Healthy Start Scheme.
- To qualify for the scheme, you have to be on certain benefits or on a certain income. At the time of writing, the scheme is also available for those who cannot claim public funds due to their immigration status.
- To find out if you can get Healthy Start, and how to apply, please visit: <https://bit.ly/3ydhJL9>.
- To find out how you can collect your vitamins, visit: <https://bit.ly/3fJTVIq>.
- Healthy Start Northern Ireland - for details, visit: <https://bit.ly/3UWiWQS>

Scotland scheme:

- If you live in Scotland, the scheme is called Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods and is also open to people receiving certain benefits. For more details, visit: <https://bit.ly/3CB7F1s>.
- To find out if you can get Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, visit: <https://bit.ly/3CB7F1s>.
- The above schemes are available to you if you are pregnant, so you don't need to wait until your baby is born.

In some areas of the UK, vitamins are provided free for all pregnant women and/or young children. If you have any questions about your baby or child's diet, eating, or want to know more about vitamins, ask your health visitor or midwife.

Further reading:

- NHS - England. Better Health Start for Life, Vitamins for mum and baby: <https://bit.ly/3rfPjMA>
- NHS Choices, Vitamins for children: <https://bit.ly/3T0d07w>
- NHS information (Scotland). Vitamins and minerals <https://bit.ly/3e2q1it>
- NHS – Wales. Pregnancy Guide - Vitamins for children: <https://bit.ly/3CBcTKC>
- nidirect government series (NHS Northern Ireland)
 - » Weaning your baby – Vitamins: <https://bit.ly/3Cwlwow>
 - » Vitamin D: <https://bit.ly/3CajOZN>
 - » Vitamin A: <https://bit.ly/3CIQeMx>
 - » Vitamin C: <https://bit.ly/3rumvY>

- Best Start Foods and Healthy Start
 - » Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods: <https://bit.ly/3gdcYI8>
 - » Healthy Start: <https://bit.ly/3Jelggw>
- First Steps Nutrition - Healthy Start and Best Start Foods A practical guide: <https://bit.ly/3RwFEME>
- Sun safety
 - » NHS
 - England - <https://bit.ly/3SCWn2b>
 - Wales - <https://bit.ly/3fGU9Ab>
 - Scotland - <https://bit.ly/3REsTzJ>
 - Northern Ireland - <https://bit.ly/3REw3U7>

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