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Vitamins for Children

What vitamins does my child need?

Children, as well as adults, will benefit from additional vitamins for their wellbeing, growth and development. Although it's still very important to have a healthy varied diet, babies from 6 months and young children may not be getting enough vitamins from food alone, especially vitamins A, C and D. The Department of Health therefore recommends daily vitamin drops from 6 months to 5 years of age and, for some babies, from birth.

What are Vitamins A, C and D?

Vitamin A is important for your child's general health because it helps their immune system work as it should to fight infection, to help with vision, and maintain healthy skin.

What happens if they're deficient in vitamin A?

For children, a lack of vitamin A may cause visual impairment, increase the risk of severe illness, and increase the risk of developing common childhood infections as diarrhoea and measles.

Foods that are good sources of vitamin A include:

- cheese
- eggs
- oily fish
- fortified low-fat spreads
- milk and yoghurt
- carrots, sweet potatoes, swede and mangoes
- dark green vegetables, such as spinach, cabbage and broccoli

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

Vitamins for Children

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is important for your child's general health and their immune system to fight infection; it can also help their body absorb iron.

What's the risk of not having enough vitamin C?

Signs of vitamin C deficiency include dry and splitting hair; gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and bleeding gums; rough, dry, scaly skin; decreased wound-healing rate, easy bruising; nosebleeds; and a decreased ability to ward off infection. A severe form of vitamin C deficiency is known as scurvy (not common in children living fulltime in the UK).

Foods that are good sources of vitamin C include:

- oranges and orange juice
- kiwi fruit
- strawberries
- broccoli
- tomatoes
- red and green peppers
- blackcurrants
- brussel sprouts

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is essential to keep your child's bones and teeth healthy, and it helps their body to absorb calcium to ensure strong bones and teeth. Without enough vitamin D, children can be at risk of developing rickets causing weak and badly-formed bones. Rickets has been on the increase in the UK in recent years.

Foods that are good sources of vitamin D include:

- oily fish - salmon, sardines, trout, (limit to twice a week for girls and four times a week for boys)
- eggs
- cereals, fat spreads such as margarine, yoghurts where vitamins have been added

Most of our vitamin D comes from direct access to our skin from sunlight during the day in the UK between April and mid-October, with darker skin colour increasing the risk of deficiency. However, it is also important to take care in the sun and to cover up or protect your child's skin with sunscreen.

Vitamin D doses (NICE 2014)

AGE	Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI)Daily
Pregnant and Breastfeeding mothers	10µg
0-6 months (babies from 1 month if mother did not take Vit D throughout pregnancy)	8.5µg
7 months -3 years (unless taking more than 500ml of formula)	7µg
People with darker skin tones, who cover their skin when outside, who spend limited time outside in summer.	Age appropriate as above with adults 10µg See iHV parent's tips on Staying Safe in the Sun at: bit.ly/1RdzlJ5

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Vitamins for Children

Recommendations

- The Department of Health recommends daily vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D for all children from 6 months to 5 years of age.
- In some areas, there may be local variations to this recommendation and vitamin D drops may be recommended from birth to all babies. You can ask your health visitor for more information.
- If you are eligible for Healthy Start vitamins, you can obtain free vitamin drops for your child by using a Healthy Start voucher. If you are not eligible for Healthy Start vitamins, you can buy a vitamin preparation with similar content (vitamins A, C and D) from chemists. If you are unsure you can speak to your health visitor for further advice.
- It is also recommended that all pregnant and breastfeeding mothers take a daily supplement of 10µg of Vitamin D. You may be more likely to have low levels of vitamin D if you spend a lot of time indoors or cover yourself up for cultural/ religious reasons.
- It is important to keep to the recommended dose of vitamins stated on the label. Do not give two supplements at the same time, as having too much of some vitamins can be harmful.
- Introduce your child to all food groups to ensure that they are getting a healthy balanced diet to help them grow and develop well.

For more information see:

NHS Choices:
bit.ly/1OXqv4C

Healthy Start:
bit.ly/1RAHIDK

Netmums:
bit.ly/1N6S5dW

NICE:
bit.ly/1PQ1xUP

.Gov:
bit.ly/1PQ1yrV