

A healthy start

It's never too early

What happens to children before they are born and in their early years can affect their health and life opportunities later on. For example, babies that are breastfed have less chance of getting infections or of becoming obese and therefore developing type 2 diabetes and other illnesses as they get older. Those who grow up in a caring and safe environment and have a healthy relationship with their parents are more likely to do better as they go through life.

If we know how to prevent illness, and encourage healthy behaviour from pregnancy onwards, our children stand a great chance of having a healthy life.

Vitamins are essential nutrients that your body needs in small amounts so that it can work properly. Even though you can get lots of vitamins from a healthy balanced diet, you still might not get everything you need at certain times in your life - such as when you're pregnant, a new mum or a small child. Ask your health visitor about the free Healthy Start vitamin vouchers.

If you don't already live a healthy lifestyle, now is a great time to start.

Start4Life

Start4Life supports the Healthy Child Programme for 0-5 year olds.

Start4Life has joined up with the NHS Information Service providing health advice for pregnant women and new mums, as well as offering tips and advice by e-mail, free of charge. It is part of the larger Change4Life initiative, which aims to help adults and families to eat well and move more.

www.nhs.uk/start4life

Healthy Start

free fruit, vegetables and vitamins

Healthy Start is a government scheme for pregnant women or women with children between the ages of 1-4. Women receive vouchers every week to support a healthy diet if they are receiving income support or other related benefits. The value of the vouchers depends on the number and age of the children. The vouchers can be used to purchase, plain cow's milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables (with no added ingredients), whole or chopped, packaged or loose.

Healthy Start vouchers can be used in participating shops. Women and children getting Healthy Start vouchers also get a free weekly vitamin voucher to exchange for Healthy Start vitamins (these can be obtained from certain Children's Centres). All women can purchase vitamins at subsidised prices. Ask your health visitor or GP for details or visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk

As well as giving your baby a healthy start, you can help support them in early experiences

and discovering the world around them. During the early months, babies explore and learn using their feet as well as their hands to feel textures and form. Leave their socks off when you can.

It's also important to spend one-to-one time, giving them your complete attention, without any distractions like the TV or mobile phone.

1

Should I give my baby sweet things to eat and drink, she loves fruit squash?

2

Drinks with added sugar are particularly bad for babies' teeth - it's like giving a baby a lolly to suck on all day. Giving your baby a 'sweet tooth' also means that they are more likely to keep pestering and crying for sugary things.

3

It's much easier to get your baby on the right track now than to try and change what they eat later.