

Vitamin D

Is your child getting enough?

Vitamin D deficiency is a very common problem in the UK. Vitamin D is important for good health, strong bones and growth. Most foods contain very little vitamin D naturally and it is mostly made in the skin by exposure to sunlight.

Vitamin D helps your baby's body absorb calcium, which is needed for the healthy development of strong bones and teeth. A deficiency of vitamin D can result in rickets, which affects the way bones develop and grow. The bones of a child with rickets are unable to sufficiently support their body weight, resulting in bowed legs.

The most important source of vitamin D is sunlight. Be aware that exposure of 10 to 15 minutes to the UK summer sun, without suncream, several times a week is probably a safe balance between adequate vitamin D levels and any risk of skin cancer.* Healthy start vitamins are available free of charge for all under fives, new mums and pregnant women across Lancashire. Visit your local Health Centre or Children's Centre to get your free supply.

Pharmacist says

Vitamin D deficiency can result in rickets in severe cases. Babies with severe vitamin D deficiency can get muscle cramps, seizures and breathing difficulties. Poor growth can also be a symptom and affected children might be reluctant to start walking. Children with vitamin D deficiency may also be late teething as the development of their milk teeth has been affected.

Health visitor says

It is advisable for mums who breastfeed their baby to take a vitamin D supplement. If your baby is six months or older, and/or is drinking less than 500ml (1 pint) of formula milk per day, it is recommended they are given vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D. It's especially important to give vitamin drops to children who are fussy about what they eat, children living in northern areas of the UK and those of Asian, African and Middle Eastern origin. If the child's mum wears concealing clothes when outdoors, it may be advisable to give children vitamin drops from one month, as they will be at higher risk of deficiency. Visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk for more details.

1

Vitamin D is naturally present in only a few foods such as fortified margarines, eggs and fatty fish.

2

Vitamin D is made naturally by the skin when it is exposed to gentle sunlight, so encourage your children to play outside.

3

It is sensible to give all children vitamin drops with vitamins A, C and D from the age of one to five years old.

*Source: British Association of Dermatologists.