



# NHS Healthy Start

Information for health professionals, local authorities  
and supporting organisations.

The NHS Healthy Start scheme helps young families and those who are pregnant to access healthy food, milk and vitamins.

The scheme is available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland have their own scheme called Best Start Foods.

People apply for the scheme online and get a prepaid card, which they use to buy healthy food and milk, and collect free Healthy Start vitamins.



# This guidance explains to health professionals, local authorities and supporting organisations how:

- the scheme works
- people can apply to the scheme
- you can play a vital role in promoting the scheme to key audiences

## Your role

Health and social care professionals and charities play a key role in signposting to the NHS Healthy Start online application and promoting the free Healthy Start vitamins.

Appointments and social care assessments are ideal opportunities to promote the scheme.

Research shows that women who are introduced to the scheme by a health professional, who takes the time to explain its public health context and health benefits, are more likely to understand the benefits and make better use of the scheme.

For more information visit the NHS Healthy Start website:

**[www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)**



# The NHS Healthy Start scheme



## Online application

An online application has replaced the paper form. Most people can apply online at [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk). If someone cannot apply online, they can contact the helpline on **0300 330 7010** or email [healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk](mailto:healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk)



## Prepaid card

A prepaid card has replaced the paper vouchers. This is topped up with the benefit every four weeks.



## Collecting Healthy Start vitamins

Beneficiaries of the NHS Healthy Start scheme can show their prepaid card as proof of entitlement to get free Healthy Start vitamins.



## Access to more retailers

Beneficiaries can use their prepaid card in any retailer that sells the eligible healthy start food and milk items and accepts Mastercard®. Retailers are no longer required to register to the scheme.



## Promotional materials

There are a range of communications and marketing materials available to download to help you promote the scheme to your audiences: <https://media.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/resources/f//nhs-healthy-start-scheme>



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# What is NHS Healthy Start?

The scheme helps young families and those who are pregnant to access healthy food, milk and vitamins.

Eligibility for the scheme also depends on the benefit the person receives and what their income is.

Beneficiaries will get:

- **£4.25** each week of their pregnancy (from the 10th week of pregnancy)
- **£8.50** each week for children from birth to one year old
- **£4.25** each week for children between one and four years old

The payments will stop on the child's 4th birthday or if they no longer receive the qualifying benefits.

## NHS Healthy Start beneficiaries can buy:

- **plain liquid cow's milk**, including **long-life, pasteurised or ultra heat treated (UHT) varieties of milk**. This does not include milk which has had chemicals, vitamins, flavours or colours added or removed.
- **fresh, frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables**, including loose, pre-packed, whole, sliced, chopped or mixed fruit or vegetables, fruit in fruit juice, or fruit or vegetables in water, but not those to which fat, salt, sugar or flavouring have been added
- **cow's milk-based infant formula milk**. This must be labelled as suitable for use from birth and satisfy, by itself, an infant's nutritional needs
- **fresh, dried and tinned pulses**, including but not limited to lentils, beans, peas and chickpeas but not those to which fat, salt, sugar or flavouring have been added

## Beneficiaries of the scheme can also collect the following free Healthy Start vitamins from their local distributors:

- Women's vitamins for those who are pregnant or have a child up to one year old
- Children's vitamin drops for children up to four years old.



# Who is eligible?

To qualify for the NHS Healthy Start scheme, an applicant must be at least 10 weeks pregnant or have at least one child under four years old.

In addition, they must be receiving any of the following:

- Child Tax Credit (if the family's annual income is £16,190 or less)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit (which includes the child addition)
- Universal Credit (if the family's take-home pay is £408 or less per month from employment)

They may also be eligible for NHS Healthy Start if:

- they're under 18 and pregnant, even if they're are not claiming any benefits
- they claim income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and are over 10 weeks pregnant
- they or their partner get Working Tax Credit run-on only. (Working Tax Credit run-on is the Working Tax Credit they receive in the four weeks immediately after they have stopped working for 16 hours or more per week)

## No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) application criteria

In June 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) agreed to temporarily extend the Healthy Start scheme to British children (aged under four), whose parent or guardian meets the financial eligibility criteria and are excluded from claiming public funds as a consequence of their immigration status, or their lack of immigration status.

To qualify for the temporary extension, applicants must meet all of the following criteria:

- have a child, or more than one child, who is aged under four;
- their family's take-home pay is less than £408 per month
- they are excluded from claiming public funds as a consequence of their immigration status or their lack of immigration status

If the applicant meets the eligibility criteria and would like to apply, they should email [Healthystartclaim@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:Healthystartclaim@dhsc.gov.uk) and DHSC will contact them to discuss the application process.

# The application process

- People can apply to the NHS Healthy Start scheme online at [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk).
- If someone cannot apply online, they can apply over the telephone by calling the NHS Healthy Start helpline on **0300 330 7010**.
- A telephone translation service is also available when calling the helpline.
- The NHS Healthy Start helpline is available **Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm**.
- The online application process enables someone to apply on the applicant's behalf. The claimant must be present during the application process to confirm their personal information and accept the prepaid card terms and conditions.
- Beneficiaries can contact the automated service on **0300 330 2090** to activate their card, check their balance, get their PIN or report a card as lost or stolen. This line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

# The beneficiary journey



Applies at [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)  
or by calling **0300 330 7010**



Completes the online process and is successful



Receives the prepaid card in the post within  
10 working days



Activates the prepaid card and receives PIN by  
calling **0300 330 2090**



Uses the prepaid card in most retailers that  
sell the eligible healthy food and milk items  
and accept Mastercard®

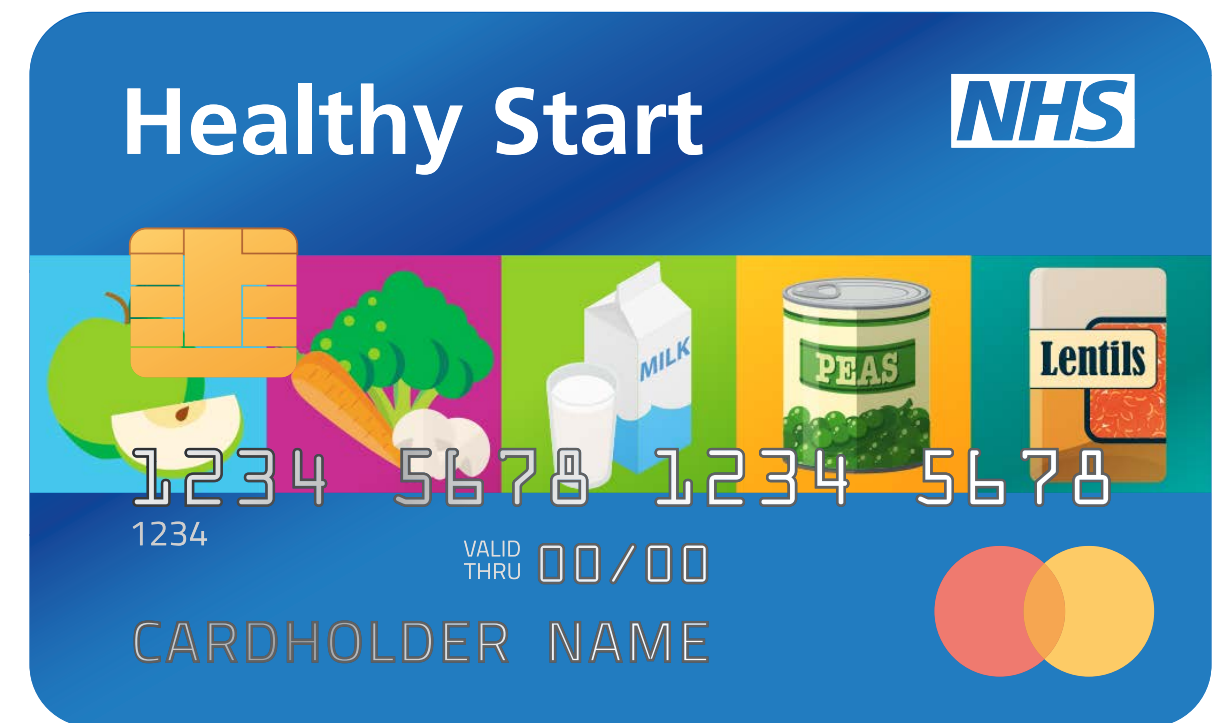


Uses the prepaid card as proof of eligibility to  
collect free Healthy Start vitamins



# The prepaid card

- Once a beneficiary has received their NHS Healthy Start prepaid card, they must activate it before it can be used. They can activate their card by calling **0300 330 2090**. This automated service is available 24 hours a day.
- The prepaid card can be used in most retail stores that sell the eligible healthy food items and display the Mastercard® acceptance mark.
- The prepaid card is issued in the beneficiary's name and can only be used by that person. Only one card can be issued to a claiming household.
- Retailers do not need to be registered to the NHS Healthy Start scheme and beneficiaries do not need to identify themselves to a retailer as an NHS Healthy Start recipient.
- A retailer is not required to check a beneficiary's purchases.
- If a beneficiary loses their card or it is stolen, they must call **0300 330 2090** immediately so the card can be stopped. Failure to do so may result in any funds on the card being lost.
- A beneficiary can request a new prepaid card by contacting the helpline. They will be sent a new card in the post within 10 working days.
- A beneficiary may check the balance on their card at an ATM or by calling **0300 330 2090**.



# Healthy Start vitamins

## Beneficiaries of the NHS Healthy Start scheme are entitled to collect free Healthy Start vitamins.

Healthy Start vitamins are available to those who are pregnant and have a child under one year old, and children under the age of four. Vitamins can be collected every eight weeks from a registered distributor.

The Healthy Start vitamins contain the exact amount of vitamins recommended by the Government to be taken as vitamin supplements and contain vitamins A, C and D for children aged from birth to four years, and folic acid and vitamins C and D for pregnant and breastfeeding women. The Healthy Start vitamins are vegetarian and Halal certified.

There are two Healthy Start branded products available.

### Healthy Start children's vitamin drops

The daily dose of five drops contains:

- 233 micrograms of vitamin A
- 20 milligrams of vitamin C
- 10 micrograms of vitamin D3

Children who are having 500ml or more of formula a day do not need Healthy Start vitamins. The vitamins are suitable for vegetarians and Halal diets. They're free from milk, egg, gluten, soya and peanut residues, and have a shelf life of 15 months from manufacture. Beneficiaries are entitled to one bottle of children's drops every eight weeks.

### Healthy Start vitamins for women

The daily dose is one tablet, which contains:

- 70 milligrams of vitamin C
- 10 micrograms of vitamin D
- 400 micrograms of folic acid

Women's vitamins are suitable for vegetarians and Halal diets. They're free from wheat, fish, egg and salt. No colours, flavours or preservatives. No gluten containing ingredients. The shelf life is two years from manufacture. Beneficiaries are entitled to one bottle of tablets every eight weeks.

### Collecting Healthy Start vitamins

Once a beneficiary has successfully applied to the NHS Healthy Start scheme, they will receive a prepaid card.

To collect their free Healthy Start vitamins, beneficiaries in England and Wales will need to present their NHS Healthy Start prepaid card as evidence of their entitlement. No payment is taken from the card. You should never record any information relating to the person's prepaid card such as the card number or 'CVV' number. Beneficiaries in Northern Ireland will receive a letter explaining how to request their free vitamins.

Vouchers are no longer used in the digital scheme, however if a beneficiary still has a valid vitamin voucher, this should be accepted. Some beneficiaries do not have a prepaid card under the new scheme, so may present an NHS Healthy Start letter when collecting their vitamins.



## How do beneficiaries know where they can collect vitamins?

It is the responsibility of local authorities and other vitamin distributors to make free Healthy Start vitamins available in their locality. There are a range of communications materials available to help local authorities and vitamin distributors to promote Healthy Start vitamins. These include posters, banners, social media graphics and animations and are available to download here: <https://media.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/resources/f/nhs-healthy-start-scheme>

Vitamin distributors in England should also ensure they have updated the NHS website to show all local venues where vitamins are stocked. You can check your current listings for Healthy Start vitamins by visiting <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/vitamins-locations>. If you need to add or change any Healthy Start vitamin locations for your local authority, please email [nhsbsa.healthystart@nhs.net](mailto:nhsbsa.healthystart@nhs.net).

## The process for vitamin distributors in England and Wales

The prepaid card will be used as evidence that the beneficiary is part of the NHS Healthy Start scheme and can collect vitamins. Vitamin distributors may ask to see a person's NHS Healthy Start prepaid card as evidence of entitlement and ask for proof of the children's age. Vouchers are no longer used in the new digital scheme, however if a beneficiary still has a valid vitamin voucher, this should be accepted. Some beneficiaries do not have a prepaid card under the new scheme, so may present an NHS Healthy Start letter when collecting their vitamins.

## How will I know how much someone is entitled to?

It is the responsibility of any organisation distributing vitamins in England and Wales to ask the person how many vitamins they might need for them and/or their children and provide that amount. Beneficiaries

who are pregnant or have a child under one are entitled to one bottle of women's vitamins every eight weeks. Those with children aged under four are entitled to one bottle of children's drops every eight weeks per child.

## How vitamin distributors can make a claim

The reimbursement process has not changed. A claim will still need to be submitted each quarter. The only change to the process is that the vitamin voucher is no longer issued. Old valid vouchers should still be accepted. Some beneficiaries may also present an NHS Healthy Start letter when collecting their vitamins. You do not need to share any evidence of the card being present as part of the reimbursement process for vitamins or provide vouchers with a claim.

You do not need to scan or swipe the card and you should never record any information relating to the prepaid card such as the card number or 'CVV' number.

It is the responsibility of local authorities and any other distributors of vitamins to work out their own processes for keeping track of vitamin distribution. If you would like to discuss your vitamin distribution process, email us at [nhsbsa.healthystart@nhs.net](mailto:nhsbsa.healthystart@nhs.net)

## The process for vitamin distributors in Northern Ireland

Beneficiaries who live in Northern Ireland will receive a one-off letter advising which vitamins they are entitled to. The beneficiary will contact the Business Services Organisation (BSO) in Northern Ireland when they need vitamins and the BSO will check their entitlement. The vitamins will then be posted out to the beneficiary.

# Promotion and campaigning

Healthcare professionals, local authorities and supporting organisations play a key role in promoting the NHS Healthy Start scheme.

## Access to promotional materials

There is a range of promotional materials available to download and use on your channels at: <https://media.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/resources/f/nhs-healthy-start-scheme>

These materials include, but are not limited to:

- Social media toolkit, content and graphics
- Editable posters
- Videos and animations
- Leaflets including Easy-Read
- Digital screen designs
- Banner designs
- Guidance documents
- Materials in other languages
- Stickers



## Modifying the communications materials

Supporting organisations may add their organisation logo to some of the communications materials.

There are some communications materials which have a clear space for organisations to add their logos and other information. These are the only promotional materials that should be modified.

The NHS logo must not be removed from any of the materials and should be placed to the top right. The supporting organisation's logo should be placed along the bottom of the page. The visual style should follow the NHS Identity guidelines. If a supporting organisation logo is added to materials, you must ensure the NHS logo is also included.

## Creating your own NHS Healthy Start promotional materials

All promotional materials should be approved by the NHSBSA before distributing.

The letters 'NHS' and the NHS logo are protected by law. They are UK trademarks owned by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and may not be produced without permission.

If you cannot use the materials provided and wish to create your own, please contact the NHSBSA communications and marketing team at: [nhsbsa.communicationsteam.nhs.net](mailto:nhsbsa.communicationsteam.nhs.net)

## Social media

There are two NHS Healthy Start scheme social media accounts, Facebook and Twitter. These are verified accounts and offer a source of information for beneficiaries and stakeholders to be updated about the NHS Healthy Start scheme. The accounts also offer additional ways of getting in touch about the NHS Healthy Start scheme.

There are regular posts and social media activities on both channels which we encourage all supporting organisations to share on their own social media channels.

Follow us by searching **@NHSHealthyStart**

# Important contacts

Visit our website: [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)

Call the NHS Healthy Start helpline: **0300 330 7010\***  
Open Monday - Friday, 8am - 6pm.

Customer service email address: [healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk](mailto:healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk)

Automated line: **0300 330 2090\***  
Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for card queries.

To contact the NHS Healthy Start team: [nhsbsa.healthystart@nhs.net](mailto:nhsbsa.healthystart@nhs.net)

For enquiries about promoting the scheme: [nhsbsa.communicationsteam@nhs.net](mailto:nhsbsa.communicationsteam@nhs.net)

Follow us on social media: [www.facebook.com/nhshealthystart](https://www.facebook.com/nhshealthystart) & [www.twitter.com/nhshealthystart](https://www.twitter.com/nhshealthystart)

\* Calls to 0300 numbers are charged at the same rate as dialling an 01 or 02 number. If your landline or mobile service has inclusive minutes to 01 / 02 numbers, then calls to 0300 are counted as part of this inclusive call volume

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