

# A healthy lifestyle

## 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 (see box on opposite page).

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

### A healthy weight

Many parents are unaware of the serious health implications of children being overweight (or obese) with a greater risk of long-term health problems, including cardiovascular problems and type 2 diabetes. Overweight babies and toddlers are more than five times as likely to be overweight as children and adults. Good eating and exercise habits need to be developed early in life. Talk to your health visitor about healthy meal ideas for all the family.

Being overweight is rarely to do with a medical problem, and is simply due to an unhealthy diet and not enough exercise. It is better to prevent your child becoming overweight in the first place. Good sleep patterns, a healthy varied diet and regular exercise will all help keep your child to a healthy weight.

### Healthy Start - free fruit, vegetables and vitamins

Healthy Start is a government scheme for pregnant women or women with children between the ages of 0-4. 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 vitamin drops can be obtained from the health visitors at the health centres or children's centres during child health clinics. All women can purchase vitamins at subsidised prices.

Ask your health visitor or GP for details or visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://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.

**Start4Life**

Healthy tips

[www.nhs.uk/start4life](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life)