Homerton Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Folic acid and vitamin D in pregnancy

1. Folic acid and neural tube defects (NTD)

Couples are at **high risk** of conceiving a child with an NTD if:

- Either partner has an NTD, they have had a previous pregnancy affected by an NTD, or they have a **family history** of an NTD or other congenital malformation.
- The patient is taking **anti–epileptic medication** (for any indication).
- The patient takes **antiviral medication for HIV**
- The patient has **diabetes mellitus**
- The patient has **sickle cell anaemia,** or **thalassaemia**.

For those patients above **AT HIGH RISK** of having a baby with an NTD:

- Prescribe **5mg daily Folic Acid** (prescription-only dosage)
- Duration: from 12 weeks *before* conception/trying for a baby, until the end of the 12th week of pregnancy
- Patients with sickle cell disease, thalassaemia, or thalassaemia trait should take folic acid 5 mg daily *throughout* pregnancy

Baseline for **ALL** patients who could become pregnant

- Advise patients to get free **healthy start** vitamins from any City and Hackney pharmacy (form on EMIS) *OR*
- Prescribe **400mcg daily Folic Acid** *OR*
- Advise patients that they can purchase Folic Acid over the counter
- Duration: from 12 weeks *before* conception/trying for a baby until the end of the 12th week of pregnancy

2. Vitamin D

Encourage **ALL** pregnant patients to take **10 micrograms of Vitamin D** every day throughout pregnancy and whilst breastfeeding

Pregnant patients, new mums who have had a baby in the last year, and babies and children from four weeks until their fourth birthday can attend participating pharmacies and children's centres in City & Hackney to get Healthy Start vitamins or collect a Healthy Start form from their GP practice (https://hackney.gov.uk/healthy-start). **Healthy Start** vitamins for women contain per tablet: folic acid 400micrograms, vitamin C 70mg and vitamin D3 10micrograms.

References

- NICE Pre-conception - advice and management
- NHS Obesity and pregnancy/Have a healthy diet in pregnancy
- NICE Maternal and child nutrition: nutrition and weight management in pregnancy, and nutrition in children up to 5 years

Reviewed and approved at ICEC: March 2025.

Reviewed and approved at ICEC: January 2026