**Healthy Start Voucher Information**

**How to apply**

**Applying online**

If you get Universal credit, you can apply online if:

* you’re at least 10 weeks pregnant or have at least one child under 4 years old
* your family’s monthly ‘take-home pay for this period’ is £408 or less from employment

If you get Child Tax Credit, you can apply online if:

* you have at least one child under 4 years old
* your family’s annual income is £16,190 or less

To apply, you’ll need your:

* name
* address
* date of birth
* National Insurance number
* baby’s due date (if you’re pregnant)
* benefit award letter if you’re over 18 (you must enter the same information that’s on this letter)

[Apply now](https://services.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/apply-for-healthy-start/)

**Applying by email or phone**

You can apply by email or phone if you’re at least 10 weeks pregnant, or have at least one child under 4 years old, and get either:

* Income Support
* Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance
* Pension Credit (which includes the child addition)
* Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for 4 weeks if your working hours, or your partner or carer’s, go to less than 16 hours per week)

You can also apply by email or phone if you’re at least 10 weeks pregnant and either:

* under 18 years old and not getting any benefits
* getting Child Tax Credits and your family’s annual income is £16,190 or less
* getting income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

You can apply by either:

* emailing healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk
* calling 0300 330 7010

Phone lines are open 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday (except public holidays). [Find out about call charges (opens in a new tab)](https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/contact-us/call-charges-and-phone-numbers).

**If you’ve previously got Healthy Start vouchers**

We are no longer sending paper vouchers. To get help to buy food and milk you need to apply for a Healthy Start card.

You can still use your Healthy Start vouchers until their expiry date. You can find the expiry date printed on your vouchers.

**If you’re not a British citizen but your child is**

You might be eligible for Healthy Start depending on your immigration status.

You can get Healthy Start if all the following are true:

* you have at least 1 British child under 4 years old – [check if your child is automatically a British citizen (opens in a new tab)](https://www.gov.uk/check-british-citizenship) if you’re not sure
* your family earns £408 or less per month after tax
* you cannot claim [‘public funds’ (opens in a new tab)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-funds--2) (for example, benefits) – either because of your immigration status or because you do not have an immigration status

Your biometric residence permit (BRP) or your [online immigration status (opens in a new tab)](https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status) will say if you cannot claim public funds. You might also have a letter from the Home Office about it.

To apply for Healthy Start, ask for an application form via email. Only use this email address if you think you cannot claim public funds because of your immigration status.

Healthystartclaim@dhsc.gov.uk

**What you’ll get and how to shop**

**How much you’ll get**

You’ll get money added onto your Healthy Start card every 4 weeks.

You’ll get:

* £4.25 each week of your pregnancy from the 10th week
* £8.50 each week for children from birth to 1 year old
* £4.25 each week for children between 1 and 4 years old

Your money will stop when your child is 4 years old, or if you do not get [benefits that make you eligible](https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply/).

You can also [get free vitamins with your card](https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/getting-vitamins/).

**Shopping with your card**

You should only use your card to buy [certain types of milk, infant formula, fruit and vegetables](https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/what-you-should-buy/).

You need to [activate your card](https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/about-your-card/) before you can use it. The first time you use your card you’ll need to use your PIN. After that, you can make contactless payments.

When you use contactless four times in a row, or spend a combined £150, you’ll need to use your PIN on the next transaction. This is to help with the security of your card.

You cannot use your Healthy Start card:

* online
* outside of the UK, including the Republic of Ireland
* on your phone’s wallet app
* to withdraw cash from an ATM
* to get cashback

**Information:Shopping with vouchers**

You can use any paper Healthy Start vouchers you have up until the expiry date shown on them. You may need to ask the retailer if they can accept the vouchers.

**Where to shop**

You can use your card in most places that sell milk, infant formula, fruit and vegetables.

They must display a Mastercard® symbol. The symbol is normally shown on the shop door or at the till. Ask an employee inside the shop if they take Mastercard if you’re unsure.

If you try to spend the money anywhere else the card will be declined. For example at a fast food restaurant.

**How to shop**

You can only spend up to the balance of your card.

You can split payments between your Healthy Start card and your normal bank card or cash. Some shops will need to do this as separate transactions.

At self-checkout machines you can only split payments between your Healthy Start card and cash, not another bank card.

Do not worry if you make a mistake when using your Healthy Start card to buy healthy food with other shopping. It will not affect your benefit payments.

**A shopping example**

Sam has £10 left on their Healthy Start card and goes to their local supermarket.

They put £6 of fresh vegetables and £2 of plain cow’s milk in their basket. They also pick up £5 of toiletries and £5 of bread and cereal.

When Sam gets to the tills, they should pay for the:

* £8 of vegetables and milk with their Healthy Start card
* £10 of toiletries, bread and cereal with their bank card or cash

**Refunds**

If you need to get a refund on something you’ve bought, go back to the shop with your items, receipt and Healthy Start card. The money will be refunded to your Healthy Start card.

**What you should buy**

You should only use your card to buy certain types of milk, infant formula, fruit and vegetables.

**Fruit and vegetables**

These should be:

* fresh or frozen or tinned
* whole or chopped
* packaged or loose
* fruit in fruit juice, or fruit or vegetables in water
* fresh, dried or tinned pulses

These should not be:

* with added ingredients like fat (oil), salt, sugar or flavourings, such as tinned tomatoes and herbs, kidney beans in chilli sauce, chips or onion rings
* juiced or pre-cooked
* fruits in syrup
* smoothies

**Plain cow’s milk**

This should be plain cow’s milk, which is pasteurised, sterilised, long-life or ultra-heat treated (UHT).

It should not be:

* flavoured
* coloured
* evaporated
* condensed
* plant-based milk
* powdered (unless it’s stage one infant formula)

**Infant formula**

This should be:

* stage one only (first infant formula)
* made from cow’s milk
* nutritionally complete

Look for ‘complete nutrition’, ‘from birth’, ‘from birth to 6 months’, or ‘from birth to 12 months’ on the label.

It should not be follow-on formula or milk (‘from 6 months’, or ‘from 6 to 12 months’).

[Find out more about infant formula (opens in a new tab)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/bottle-feeding/types-of-formula/).

**Getting vitamins**

We are moving from paper vouchers to the Healthy Start card. We will send the last paper vouchers out on the week starting the 7th March. You can still use any valid vouchers to get free vitamins.

**Why you should get your free Healthy Start vitamins**

Young children may not get enough vitamin A and D even if they are eating well. If you are pregnant and breastfeeding you may not get enough vitamin C or D or folic acid.

You can use your Healthy Start card to get these important vitamins for free. These come as NHS Healthy Start tablets and drops for children.

They do not contain milk, egg, gluten, soya or peanut residues. They’re suitable for vegetarians and halal diets.

You can get the vitamin tablets while you’re pregnant and up to your baby’s 1st birthday. They contain:

* folic acid which lowers the chance of babies having spinal problems
* vitamin C which helps the body’s soft tissue
* vitamin D which helps babies’ bones to develop properly

Children can take vitamin drops if they:

* are less than 4 years old
* have less than 500ml (about one pint) of infant formula a day – as formula already has vitamins added to it

Healthy Start vitamins come as an 8-week supply of:

* 56 tablets (a daily dose of 1 tablet)
* 280 drops (a daily dose of 5 drops)

You or your children should not take more than the recommended amount.

[Find out more about the vitamins you and your baby need and why (opens in a new tab)](https://www.nhs.uk/start4life).

**How to get free vitamins if you live in England**

Ask your midwife or health visitor where to get your free vitamins.

You can also [find who stocks Healthy Start vitamins in your local area (opens in a new tab)](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/healthy-start-vitamins/locationsearch/348).

To collect your free vitamins, you’ll have to show your Healthy Start card or vouchers.

**How to get free vitamins if you live in Wales**

You can collect free vitamins at your local health board. You will need to show your Healthy Start card or vouchers.

**How to get free vitamins if you live in Northern Ireland and have a Healthy Start card**

If you are eligible, we will send you a letter explaining how to request your free vitamins. We will check your request and send your order to the Business Services Organisation in Northern Ireland. They will then post the vitamins to you.

**How to get free vitamins if you live in Northern Ireland and have valid paper vouchers**

Put your vitamin vouchers and the Healthy Start letter that comes with them in an envelope. Send the envelope to:

Business Services Organisation
Healthy Start vitamin scheme
Pinewood Villa
73 Loughgall Road
Armagh
BT61 7PR

The Business Services Organisation will then post the vitamins to you.

**Retailers**

Healthy Start prepaid cards have replaced paper vouchers.

You can accept Healthy Start card payments if your retail store accepts Mastercard® and has a card payment facility allowing chip and pin, or contactless payments.

People can use their cards to buy the following:

* Plain cow’s milk – whole, semi-skimmed or skimmed. It can be pasteurised, sterilised long-life or UHT.
* Fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables including loose, prepacked, 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.

You are not responsible for checking which items people buy with their card. It is the responsibility of the person using the card.

**If you have accepted Healthy Start vouchers**

The last paper vouchers issued were valid until 24 April 2022.

You must submit any reimbursement claims before 11.59pm on 23 October 2022 or you will not receive your payments.