



UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF VOUCHERS AND VITAMINS

Thank you for helping us with this research by talking to us about Healthy Start

Over 100 women who got, or could get, Healthy Start talked to us. We also heard from over 700 midwives, health visitors and other people who had something to do with Healthy Start as part of their job.

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US ABOUT HEALTHY START:

1: Is Healthy Start important?

Women said:

“Healthy Start helps us buy more fruit and vegetables. We can afford tastier ones like grapes.”

“We can try out new fruit and vegetables with our children.”

“The vouchers remind me that it’s important to eat a healthy diet.”

“Food is getting more expensive, so the vouchers aren’t as much help as they used to be.”

Midwives and health visitors said:

“Healthy Start is good for pregnant women and children. It helps them eat more healthily and have more vitamins.”

“But it’s not good that there are some women and children who can’t afford to eat well but who can’t get Healthy Start.”



2: How do people find out about Healthy Start?

Women said:

“Most of us found out about Healthy Start from our midwife or health visitor.”

“Some of us have never heard of Healthy Start, especially if we don’t speak English.”

Midwives and health visitors said:

“We have to tell pregnant women and new mums such a lot of things, so information about Healthy Start can get lost.”

“We need a way to tell women who don’t speak English and women who can’t read about Healthy Start.”

3: Does Healthy Start help people get information about healthy lifestyles?

Midwives and health visitors said

“Not really – we talk to all women about healthy eating and breastfeeding.”

“We don’t have time to do this properly.”

“We need more training to make sure all health professionals know the latest information to give women, and know all about Healthy Start.”

4. Do you know who can get Healthy Start?

Women said:

“It’s hard to understand if you’re under 18 because there are different rules when you’re pregnant and after your baby is born.”

“It’s not fair that you can’t get Healthy Start if you’re in a low paid job and get Working Tax Credit.”

“It’s hard to know if you can get Healthy Start if you’re self-employed or your income goes up and down.”

“Children should get Healthy Start until they’re five or until they start school.”

Midwives and health visitors said:

“Some of us give all women Healthy Start information and let them decide.”

“Some of us try to work out who can get Healthy Start by asking about benefits or tax credits.”



5: What's it like applying for Healthy Start?

Women said:

"Applying is OK but sometimes you have to apply several times before they accept you."

"Sometimes it takes ages before the vouchers come."

"It's really hard to apply if you don't speak English or you can't read."

Midwives and health visitors said:

"Lots of women need help to fill in the form, but we don't have time to help them."

"People lose out because the Healthy Start Unit often says the form has been lost in the post or they take a long time to send out the vouchers."

"It would be easier if we didn't have to sign the form."

6: What's it like using Healthy Start vouchers?

Women said:

"Most of us know what we can spend the vouchers on, but some of us didn't know you could use them for frozen fruit and vegetables."

"It's embarrassing using the vouchers because it means people in the shop know you are poor."

"It would be better if we could use the vouchers in more local shops and markets. Some of us live too far from a supermarket and some of us can't get the food for our culture from supermarkets."

"Some shops make up their own rules like how many vouchers you can use on each shopping trip."

"It would be good if you could use the vouchers for online shopping."

Midwives and health visitors said:

"We should give women better information about where they can spend their vouchers."

"Maybe instead of the paper vouchers there could be an electronic card."



7. What do you think about Healthy Start vitamins?

Women said:

“Many of us didn’t realise we could get free vitamins, or we don’t know where to get them.”

“It would be better if we could get vitamins in the same shops where we spend the vouchers, or other places that are easy to get to.”

Midwives and health visitors said:

“Vitamins are really important for pregnant women and children but lots of people don’t know that.”

“Many women and children don’t have enough vitamin D, not just families who can get Healthy Start.”

“The system for giving out Healthy Start vitamins has been made very complicated and expensive.”

“It would be much better to give out free vitamins to all pregnant women and young children, so no one gets missed out.”

8. Is it right that Healthy Start includes formula milk?

Women said:

“Healthy Start doesn’t affect how we decide to feed our babies, but if we decide to bottle feed it’s really good that Healthy Start helps us to afford the formula.”

“It’s a problem that a tin of formula milk costs more than two vouchers.”

Midwives and health visitors said:

“Some of us are worried that Healthy Start might encourage women to bottle feed.”

“It might make bottle feeding sound like it’s ‘healthy’ when breastfeeding is better for babies.”

“But the most important thing is that all women can afford to feed their babies safely, so it’s good to have formula milk as part of Healthy Start.”



What we recommend should happen to Healthy Start:

- Make it easier to understand who can get Healthy Start and make applying easier
 - Give free vitamins to all pregnant women, new mums and children under five
 - Increase voucher value in line with food price rises
 - Make clear the reasons for including formula milk
 - Continue to research the best ways to deliver Healthy Start
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