

Position statement on the prescribing of vitamins and minerals

In line with NHS England's guidance on conditions for which over-the-counter items should not be routinely prescribed, SW London CCGs* do not support the routine prescribing of vitamins and minerals on prescription unless indicated for actual vitamin or mineral deficiency.

The prescribing of vitamins and minerals on the NHS is only recommended by the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) for the prevention and treatment of specific deficiency states, or where the diet is known to be inadequate.¹

Vitamins and minerals should not be prescribed on prescriptions as a general 'pick-me-up' or as a dietary supplement**, as there is limited evidence of clinical benefit.²

**Exceptions:

- Medically diagnosed deficiency, including for those patients who may have a lifelong or chronic condition or have undergone surgery that results in malabsorption. Continuing need should however be reviewed on a regular basis. (**NB** maintenance or preventative treatment is not an exception).
- Calcium and vitamin D for osteoporosis.
- Malnutrition including alcoholism (see [NICE guidance](#))

Rationale

- Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients which most people should get from eating a healthy, varied and balanced diet.²
- Many vitamin and mineral supplements are classified as foods, not medicines, and therefore do not have to go through the strict criteria laid down by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to confirm their quality, safety and efficacy before reaching the market.³ It is therefore not deemed appropriate for such preparations to be routinely funded on the NHS.
- There are limited multivitamin and mineral preparations that are recommended for prescribing in accordance with ACBS criteria. These include vitamin capsules, Abidec[®], Dalivit[®], Forceval[®] and Ketovite[®], with the latter two licensed for specific conditions.¹ Such preparations should only be prescribed within their product licenses and in line with an ACBS approved indication.²
- Some vitamin and mineral preparations are also listed in part XVIII A of the Drug Tariff (Drugs, Medicines and Other Substances not to be ordered under a General Medical Services Contract) e.g. Sanatogen[®] multivitamin tablets. Such preparations are not permitted on an NHS prescription and will not be reimbursed by the NHS Prescription Services.
- Taking too many vitamins and minerals, or for too long, could be harmful. This is especially true in the case of preparations containing vitamins A or D, or mega-vitamin therapy with water-soluble vitamins such as ascorbic acid and pyridoxine which is unscientific and can be harmful.²
- CCGs will only support the routine prescribing on the NHS or recommend interventions that are supported by evidence that demonstrates clinical and cost effectiveness. At present, there is insufficient high quality evidence to demonstrate clinical effectiveness of vitamins and minerals outside of the ACBS approved indications.

References

1. BNF 72. September 2016 - March 2017.
2. PRESCQIPP bulletin 107, August 2015; The prescribing of vitamins and minerals including vitamin B preparations (DROP-list) <https://www.prescqipp.info/-vitamins-and-minerals/send/212-vitamins-and-minerals-drop-list/2104-bulletin-107-vitamins-and-minerals-drop-list>.
3. NHS Choices: Supplements, Who Needs Them? A behind the Headlines Report, June 2011. https://www.nhs.uk/news/2011/05May/Documents/BtH_supplements.pdf
4. NHS Choices: Do I need vitamin Supplements? <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/1122.aspx> Accessed March 2017.

Further information available from:

- NHS England. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/> Updated 3rd May 2018.

*SWL CCGs (NHS Croydon CCG, NHS Kingston CCG, NHS Merton CCG, NHS Richmond CCG, NHS Sutton CCG and NHS Wandsworth CCG) position statement on the prescribing of vitamins and minerals

Guidance for clinicians

Recommendations:

- Vitamins and minerals outside of the ACBS approved indications should not be prescribed on the NHS or recommended due to the lack of evidence of clinical effectiveness.^{1,2}
- Review all patients currently prescribed vitamin and mineral preparations on the NHS, and discontinue therapy in those patients where treatment is not in line with an ACBS approved indication.
- Advise patients on how to eat a healthy, varied and well-balanced diet to provide the vitamins and minerals needed.
- If patients still want to take vitamins and minerals for dietary supplementation or as a 'pick-me-up', they should be advised that these can be purchased as self-care products over-the-counter with the support of the community pharmacist.
- Do not initiate new prescriptions for vitamin and mineral preparations unless they are for the management of actual or potential vitamin or mineral deficiency in-line with an ACBS approved indication.
- Some multivitamins and minerals are recommended for pregnant and breast-feeding women, and children under 5, as a preventative measure. Patients should be advised to purchase these supplements over-the-counter as part of self-care.
- Some patients may be eligible for free vitamins via the Healthy Start scheme, which have specific formulations for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and for children under 5 years of age. These vitamins are available at local distribution points. Information can be found on the [Healthy Start website](#).
- Patients who have undergone bariatric surgery should continue to have the recommended vitamins and minerals prescribed as per hospital discharge advice.

Guidance for patients, carers and guardians

- Most people should get all the nutrients they need by having a varied and balanced diet, and therefore should not require vitamin and mineral supplements.⁴
- If you have been receiving vitamin and mineral supplements on prescription, your GP may stop prescribing them for you. This is because they believe that it is no longer required on prescription.
- If you wish to continue taking vitamin and mineral preparations, these can be purchased over-the-counter from community pharmacies with the support of your community pharmacist, health food shops and other retail shops.
- Some patient groups are advised to take over-the-counter multivitamin supplements to prevent them from getting a deficiency. This includes pregnant and breast-feeding women, and children under 5 years of age. For advice on suitable preparations, speak to your community pharmacist, health visitor or midwife.
- If you are pregnant, breast-feeding or have a child under 5 years of age, you may be eligible to receive vitamins free of charge via the Healthy Start scheme. Information about Healthy Start can be found on the [Healthy Start website](#).
- Many people choose to take supplements, but taking too much for too long could be harmful.⁴ Speak to your community pharmacist for advice.
- Further information on using vitamin and minerals can be found on the [NHS Choices website](#).

The NHS belongs to YOU, use it responsibly