

Best Start Foods in Scotland and changes to the Healthy Start scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from April 2020

The Healthy Start scheme applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland it is devolved and is called 'Best Start Foods'.



Best Start Foods coordinates with the Best Start Grant programme and offers pregnant women and children up to 3 years of age in low income families £17 every 4 weeks (£4.25 per week) in pregnancy and for a child 1-3 years and £34 every 4 weeks (£8.50 per week) for babies in the first year.

Money is provided on a pre-paid card which has a pin number and can also be used contactless and online.

The scheme has wider eligibility than the Healthy Start scheme. Under 18's do not need to be on any payments or benefits to apply for Best Start Foods. Parents over 18 years can apply whether they are in work or not, as long as they are getting:



- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit and joint income from working is less than £610 a month, after tax and National Insurance – Universal Credit payments are not counted as part of this
- Child Tax Credit if not getting Working Tax and joint income from working is less than £16,190 per year
- Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit if income from working is less than £7,320 per year

Best Start Foods also allows those eligible to buy a wider selection of foods: fresh eggs, milk (plain cow's milk and first infant formula), fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen or tinned - those with added sugar are excluded), pulses (e.g. peas, lentils and beans - dried, fresh, frozen or tinned). The card can be used anywhere that sells those foods that takes electronic payments.

More details can be found here:

<https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/>

<https://nhsforthvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Best-Start-Foods-Flyer-Version-Print-August-2019.pdf>

Vitamins

Healthy Start vitamins remain in place in Scotland. All pregnant women in Scotland are entitled to Healthy Start vitamins throughout their pregnancy provided by a midwife.

Those eligible for Best Start Foods also get Healthy Start vitamins for children up until they reach the age of four. There are different arrangements in different areas of Scotland for access to these so families should ask their midwife or health visitor.

Changes to the Healthy Start scheme in 2020

From 6th April 2020 a new Statutory Instrument came into force called '**The Healthy Start Scheme and Welfare Food (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2020**'. SI 2020 No 267). All the regulations came into force in April apart from one regulatory change that comes into force on October 1st 2020. No changes have been made to eligibility criteria and to the value of the benefit.

To qualify for Healthy Start someone must be least 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four years old and be in receipt of:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit with a family income of £16,190 or less per year
- Pension Credit; or
- Universal Credit with no earned income or total earned income of £408 or less per month for the family.
- Under 18's who are pregnant are eligible and don't need to have qualifying benefits.

The main changes to the scheme are:

- i. The payments can be made as vouchers, electronically or on a pre-paid card (this pre-empts a pre-paid card being made available later in October 2020).
- ii. The value remains £3.10 but the SI allows the Secretary of State to increase or decrease the voucher value. This must be done with regard to the cost of purchasing Healthy Start food and its supply.
- iii. Vouchers are cancelled if not used after 16 weeks.
- iv. The application form no longer needs to be signed by a health professional.
- v. Food outlets will not have to register to take vouchers
- vi. If a beneficiary cannot use a voucher within a reasonable distance of beneficiary's home then they can be paid the amount due.

The scheme is being digitised but electronic application forms are not yet available, and the NHS Business Authority managing the scheme estimate online applications will start in October 2020. Until then a paper form still needs to be sent in as application. It is likely everyone will have to re-register in October but further details are awaited.

From October 1st 2020 foods that you can purchase with Healthy Start vouchers will be changed:

Fresh, frozen or **canned** fruit and vegetables including loose, pre-packed, 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. **Fresh dried or canned pulses**, including but not limited to lentils, beans, peas and chickpeas but not those to which fat, salt, sugar or flavouring have been added.

Healthy Start vitamins remain the responsibility of local public health teams.

More information can be found on the **Healthy Start website** www.healthystart.nhs.uk