

Vitamins and minerals

This briefing focuses on the prescribing of vitamin preparations, vitamin and mineral preparations, and their review. The aim is to discontinue those that are being prescribed as dietary supplements or as a general “pick-me-up” as these may be unnecessary or may be purchased over-the-counter.

Overview

NHS England and All Wales Medicines Strategy Group guidance on items that should not routinely be prescribed in primary care includes vitamins and minerals.^{1,2}

Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients which most people should get from eating a healthy, varied, and balanced diet. There are numerous online resources available which patients can be signposted to that offer lifestyle advice covering healthy eating to achieve a nutritious diet and a healthy weight, for example:

NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

The Eatwell Guide Booklet at www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide

Key recommendations

- Review all patients prescribed vitamin preparations, and vitamin and mineral preparations to ensure that prescribing is only for the management of actual or potential vitamin or mineral deficiency.
- Discontinue prescribing for preparations that are being prescribed as dietary supplements or as a general “pick-me-up”.
- Recommend eating a healthy, varied, and well-balanced diet to provide the vitamins and minerals needed and consider using this medicines optimisation project as an opportunity to promote healthy eating to all patients.
- If patients still want to take vitamins and minerals for dietary supplementation or as a “pick-me-up” they should be advised to purchase them over-the-counter and seek advice on appropriate products from the community pharmacist.
- Do not initiate new prescriptions for these preparations unless they are for the management of actual or potential vitamin and mineral deficiency.
- Some patients may be eligible for NHS Healthy Start vitamins which are specifically designed for use during pregnancy, whilst breast feeding and for growing children from birth up to the age of 4 years. In Scotland, Healthy Start vitamins are offered to all pregnant women, and a vitamin D supplement is currently offered to all breastfeeding women and children under 12 months.
- Review all patients prescribed vitamin B preparations to ensure that it is appropriate, and that the most cost-effective preparation is prescribed.

Savings available

Approximately £94.5 million in England, £6.8 million in Wales and £10.2 million in Scotland is spent annually on the prescribing of vitamins and minerals [NHSBSA May-July21, and Public Health Scotland Apr-Jun21].

Patients who are being prescribed these preparations as dietary supplements or as a general “pick-me-up” should have their vitamin and mineral preparation discontinued and a healthy balanced diet or self-care with an OTC preparation should be recommended.

Prescribing 10% less would save £9.4 million in England, £681,918 in Wales and £1 million in Scotland in 12 months [NHSBSA May-July21, and Public Health Scotland Apr-Jun21].




Approximately £21.2million in England, £2.2million in Wales and £2.5million in Scotland per year is spent on cyanocobalamin 50 and 100 microgram tablets [NHSBSA May-July21, and Public Health Scotland Apr-Jun21].

If 50% of prescriptions were reviewed and transferred to self-care this could save £10.6 million in England, £1.1 million in Wales and £1.3 million in Scotland in 12 months [NHSBSA May-July21, and Public Health Scotland Apr-Jun21].

Approximately £4.5million in England, £147,936 in Wales and £187,952 in Scotland is spent annually on vitamin B compound tablets. **Changing these prescriptions to vitamin B compound strong tablets could save £450,199 in England, £14,586 in Wales and £22,191 in Scotland in 12 months [NHSBSA May-July21, and Public Health Scotland Apr-Jun21].**

References

1. NHS England. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care - Guidance for CCGs. Published 29/03/18. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/>
2. All Wales Medicines Strategy Group. Items identified as low value for prescribing in NHS Wales. Paper 3. Updated May 2021. <https://awmsg.nhs.wales/medicines-appraisals-and-guidance/medicines-optimisation/prescribing-guidance/items-identified-as-low-value-for-prescribing-in-nhs-wales/>

Additional resources available	 Bulletin	https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-296-vitamins-and-minerals/
	 Tools	
	 Data pack	https://data.prescqipp.info/?pdata.u/#/views/B296_Vitaminsandminerals/FrontPage?.iid=1

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