

Statement on Nutricia 'nutrimum' October 2017



This statement is designed for healthcare professionals who are asked about the suitability of cereal bars marketed for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

This statement can be used to support NICE public health guidance on 'Maternal and Child Nutrition' (PH 11) and NICE Quality Standard (QS98) which recommend that:

'Health professionals have the appropriate knowledge and skills to give advice on

- the nutritional needs of women and the importance of a balanced diet before, during and after pregnancy (including the need for suitable folic acid supplements)*
- the rationale for recommending certain dietary supplements (for example, vitamin D) to pregnant and breastfeeding women.'*

'Pregnant women attending antenatal and health visitor appointments are given advice on how to eat healthily in pregnancy,'

and that

'Health professionals should advise pregnant women and parents of children under four about the Healthy Start scheme...and offer the maternal Healthy Start vitamin supplement (folic acid, vitamins C and D) to pregnant women who are (or who may be) eligible.'^{1,2,3}

What products are included in the nutrimum range?

Nutricia 'nutrimum' was launched in the UK in February 2015 as a food supplement for pregnant and breastfeeding women. The vitamin and mineral supplement was originally incorporated into cereal bars and granola for pregnant women and breastfeeding women. Nutricia also manufacture Aptamil and Cow & Gate infant milks and foods, and Nutricia's parent company is Danone.⁴

The nutrimum pregnancy and breastfeeding bars were re-launched in August 2017 and the granola was discontinued, perhaps reflecting disappointing sales. This new statement provides information about the cereal bars currently available.

What claims are made about nutrimum?

At the original launch of the products Charlotte Hemmings from Nutricia Early Life Nutrition stated in the press release that *'nutrimum was inspired by the science of early life to help pregnant and breastfeeding women positively influence their baby's future health.'* The current marketing on the website claims the bars are *'Specially created by our nutrition experts, nutrimum combines delicious ingredients with tailored nutrients for pregnancy and breastfeeding.'*

The website also subtly undermines breastfeeding with this statement *'Breastfeeding is great for your little one - but it can take a lot out of you. So while you're providing for them, our tasty breastfeeding snack bars have been specially formulated to help support you.'*⁴ Current public health guidance recommends a normal healthy diet for breastfeeding women.

Women are also targeted via the mother and baby media in print magazines, baby shows and bespoke baby events such as a 'nutrimum pop up nutrition experience' called *'nutri[mum] knows best'* where attendees heard a talk about maternal diet from a dietitian (Lucy Jones) and a midwife (Clemmie Hooper) and received nutrimum branded marketing material. Advertising and/or editorial content for nutrimum have been run in Mother and Baby magazine, the Baby and Toddler show (which is sponsored by Emma's Diary, itself a product of the Royal College of General Practitioners), the Baby London, Loved by Parents and Project B websites. Nutrimum cereal bars are included in 'gift packs' via the Project B website which requires parents to sign up and pay to receive a discounted range of commercial products aimed at mothers to be. Parents who sign up to the Boots Parenting Club also receive free nutrimum samples in the post.

Healthcare professionals are also targeted by Nutricia Early Life Nutrition via advertising for nutrimum which appears on their webpages for events and e-learning and in some health professional journals.

We believe the cereal bars are a marketing opportunity to reach out to women at the start of their parenting journey. Danone Nutricia offer themselves as a source of nutrition knowledge and using products in pregnancy may influence future food purchasing decisions through brand loyalty development. Providing a product to use when pregnant, or breastfeeding also provides an opportunity to link pregnant women to the advice lines run by Danone Nutricia and to offer a continuum of support on the Danone Nutricia early life nutrition website.

What has changed since the products were first launched?

Currently nutrimum is only available through Boots and Ocado. There have been a number of changes to the range since the original launch, many of which appear to reflect criticisms we made about the product:

1. The very expensive granola has been discontinued.
2. DHA (a source of omega 3 fats) is no longer added and claims for this have been removed.
3. The previous products claimed on front of pack to offer 10 key nutrients in the bars, and whilst 9 nutrients are still added, the main claim only highlights 4 of these (folic acid, vitamin D and Vitamins B2 and B6 in pregnancy bars; Vitamin D, Vitamins B2 and B6 and iron in breastfeeding bars).
4. The sugar content in the bars has been reduced from the original 36% of energy to about 20-25% of energy. Glucose syrup is no longer the main ingredient.
5. The packaging has been redesigned to look more like a normal cereal bar packet, without the pictures of pregnant and breastfeeding women and pseudo-scientific graphics previously used.
6. The packaging now highlights the energy content of the bar (112-114kcal per 30g bar) and shows ingredients such as berries, chocolate and oats around the bar.
7. The cost of the bars has been reduced from £4.99 to £2.99 for 5 bars (60p per bar).

Previous packaging



new packaging



We believe these products undermine public health messages for the following reasons:

1. The product states that women can use these bars in conjunction with pregnancy supplements (tablets, pills etc.) but that they do not advise that both are taken on the same day.

The statement does not reflect public health guidance on supplementation in pregnancy. In the UK pregnant women are recommended to take 400 micrograms of folic acid when they plan a pregnancy and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy (although taking it throughout pregnancy is also encouraged).

Some women require a higher dose of folic acid as they are at increased risk of having a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect and are recommended to take a higher dose of 5 milligrams a day until 12 weeks of pregnancy. Women have an increased risk if:

- they or their partner have a neural tube defect or a family history of neural tube defect
- they have had a previous pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect
- they are clinically obese (BMI>30)
- they have diabetes
- they are on some anti-epileptic medication.

There is no suggestion on the packaging that some women may need more than the 400 micrograms they claim is 'the amount in full' that pregnant women need, and there is no suggestion on the packaging that women should seek advice from a health professional as to whether these are suitable products for them.

By suggesting a greater number of nutrients are needed than recommended undermines the national Healthy Start scheme vitamin programme which is a welfare entitlement for eligible pregnant women.³ Lower income and young (<18y) pregnant women are entitled to free vitamins in pregnancy and in some areas of the country Healthy Start vitamins are free to all pregnant women. Pregnant and breastfeeding women (1 year post-partum) can also obtain free vitamins on prescription.

Women (or relatives and friends of a women who is pregnant or breastfeeding) may buy the nutrimum cereal bars instead of the supplements recommended, or a woman may give up supplementation recommended to her by a healthcare professional. She may however not continue with the product long term (potentially for reasons stated later about expense and taste) and not return to other supplements.

2. The inclusion of unnecessary additional nutrients undermines a normal diet

The NICE clinical guidelines for 'Antenatal care for uncomplicated pregnancies' (CG62)⁵ and Maternal and Child Nutrition public health guidelines (PH11)¹ make no recommendation about a requirement for nutrition supplements over and above a folic acid and vitamin D requirement.



A recent paper published in the Drugs and Therapeutics Bulletin (2016) on 'Vitamins in Pregnancy' found that *'multivitamin and mineral supplements marketed to pregnant women are unlikely to be needed by most mums-to-be and are an unnecessary expense'* and that women should focus on folic acid and Vitamin D instead.⁶

Information about Nutrimum on www.eln.nutricia.co.uk – the website for health professionals makes the following statement:

'With over a third of pregnant mums not taking the supplements recommended by the Department of Health¹, it's good to know Nutrimum Pregnancy Bars provide a tasty and convenient alternative.'

The reference given here is to *'OnePoll. Early nutrition surveys of mothers/mothers-to-be and healthcare professionals. August 2014. Data on file.'*

Companies frequently provide their own data from polls and surveys without making the data available for others to view, and this is not peer reviewed. The company is suggesting that their product is an alternative to the supplements the Department of Health recommends, and this is not true.

3. Using Nutrimum as a source of these supplements is expensive

	Cost per day
30g Nutrimum cereal bar	60p
Folic acid supplement (400µg) and vitamin D supplement (10µg) bought in a pharmacy or supermarket (own brand) for use during pregnancy ^a	5p
Vitamin D supplement (10µg) for use during breastfeeding ^b	2.5p
Women eligible to Healthy Start vitamins or living in areas where these are provided to all pregnant and breastfeeding women or who are prescribed vitamins by their GP (pregnant women and women 12 months after birth are eligible for free prescriptions).	FREE

^a Based on Superdrug Folic acid (400µg) and Vitamin D (10µg) tablets, 60 for £2.99, October 2017

^b Based on Superdrug Vitamin D (12.5µg) 90 tablets for £2.15. October 2017. (12.5 µg is a safe alternative to 10µg a day. Healthy Start vitamins contain 10µg and these can be ordered through pharmacists).

Many of the nutrients highlighted in the cereal bar are present in a normal healthy diet due to the natural presence of these nutrients in foods. For women who are not eligible to free maternal Healthy Start vitamins or who have these prescribed, purchasing the recommended dose of folic acid and vitamin D supplements over the counter is very cheap and costs around 3-5p per day.

Good nutrition from food is perfectly possible for pregnant and breastfeeding mums and we show how nutrient requirements can be met through simple, cost effective menu choices in our practical Eating Well resources. The money spent on these supplements could be more wisely used buying fresh and minimally processed foods for the household. Our practical photographic Eating Well resources to support pregnant women, pregnant teenagers and new mums to eat well cost-effectively can be found at www.firststepsnutrition.org

4. The products are high in sugar and are ultra-processed.

The cereal bars have between 19% and 26% energy from added sugars – these equate to an amber or red front of pack traffic light label for sugar respectively. In the previous statement in February 2015 glucose syrup was the main ingredient. Whilst this is no longer

the case, and the sugar content has been reduced, the cereal bars are ultra-processed. Excluding the added nutrients there are 15-17 ingredients in each cereal bar.

5. The labelling information is misleading

The Nutrium nutrition labelling claims that their pregnancy and breastfeeding cereal bars provide 200% of the reference intake (%RI) for vitamin D per 30g portion and the pregnancy bars 200% of folic acid. This is based on the amounts recommended for average adults for use in food labelling, but not pregnant women, for whom these represent 100% of the amount recommended. This is misleading when the product is marketed to a specific population group. Women who read the nutrition panel may believe they only need half a bar to meet their needs.

6. There is no warning on the individual cereal bars that these supplements are not suitable for children.

There is a warning on the main packaging that the product '*Should be stored out of the reach of young children,*' and that only one portion a day should be consumed. The actual packaging for the individual cereal bars is however cream coloured with just the word 'nutrium' written on it and does not contain information on the product, who it is suitable for, or any nutritional information. This individual packaging should also make it clear that this product is not suitable for children and that only one cereal bar should be consumed per day.

We recommend that the first priority for healthcare professionals supporting pregnant and breastfeeding women is to support current policy recommendations on vitamin supplementation.

Women and their families and friends should be discouraged from spending considerable sums of money on ultra-processed supplemental foods that offer no nutritional advantage to a healthy diet and appropriate supplementation.

Advice on how to eat well in pregnancy, and as a new mum, can be found in the freely downloadable First Steps Nutrition Trust publications available at www.firststepsnutrition.org.

References

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