

'Boost Your B12 ' –Vitamin B12 toolkit

Supporting the switch to dietary changes and pharmacy/supermarket bought oral vitamin B12 supplements, for suitable patients, to replace routine NHS vitamin B12 prescriptions or injections.

17/09/26 V4

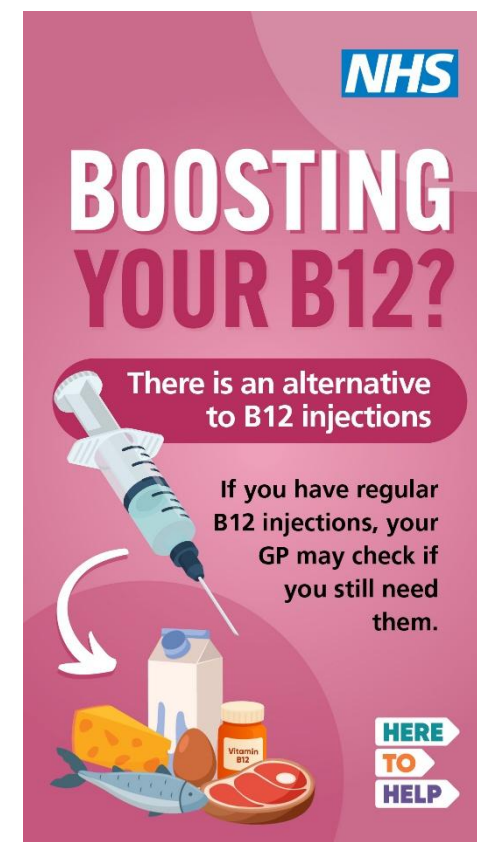
The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) has developed the '**Boost your B12**' toolkit to support NHS and local authority communications leads, GP practices, and community pharmacies.

The campaign aims to raise awareness and reduce unnecessary use of NHS vitamin B12 prescriptions or injections in people who can absorb vitamin B12 normally and do not have pernicious anaemia. It promotes safe and effective dietary changes and oral pharmacy/supermarket-bought vitamin B12 options and supports more consistent care in line with NICE guidance and local recommendations.

The toolkit provides content aimed at people who have been identified by their GP practice as having low vitamin B12 levels, would benefit from self-care, or may be receiving injectable vitamin B12 treatment unnecessarily, and is for sharing across NHS partner social media and other communication channels.

Download the online digital toolkit here:

<https://www.northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/toolkits/vitamin-b12/>



Background

Vitamin B12 is an important vitamin that helps keep the body healthy. It helps nerves work properly, supports memory and thinking, and helps the body make red blood cells. Low vitamin B12 levels can cause tiredness, weakness, poor concentration and, in severe cases, nerve problems.

Low vitamin B12 can happen for different reasons. Some people do not get enough vitamin B12 from their diet, especially if they follow a vegetarian, vegan or restricted diet. In many of these cases, vitamin B12 levels can be improved by eating more vitamin B12-rich foods and taking vitamin B12 tablets bought from a pharmacy or supermarket.

Other people may have conditions that may stop the body absorbing vitamin B12 properly. This can happen in people with pernicious anaemia, inflammatory bowel disease, previous stomach or bowel surgery, or those taking certain medicines such as metformin or long-term acid-reducing tablets. These patients may need treatment and monitoring from the NHS.

Many people with low vitamin B12 can be treated safely and effectively with diet changes and oral pharmacy/supermarket bought vitamin B12 tablets. However, across the NHS there are differences in how vitamin B12 deficiency is managed, and many patients continue to receive regular vitamin B12 injections or NHS prescriptions when they may no longer be needed.

The North East and North Cumbria ICB is currently the fourth highest prescriber of injectable vitamin B12 in England.

NICE guidance (NG239) now supports the use of oral vitamin B12 for many patients, particularly when low vitamin B12 is linked to diet or where the body can still absorb vitamin B12 normally. NHS England also encourages self-care and the use of over the counter (OTC) treatments where appropriate.

Despite this guidance, injectable vitamin B12 is still often used in patients who do not have pernicious anaemia or another condition affecting absorption. This can lead to unnecessary injections, avoidable GP and nurse appointments, differences in care, and added pressure on NHS services.

The impact of vitamin B12 injections

50,265 people across the North East and North Cumbria currently receive prescribed vitamin B12 injections.

GP practices in our region spend around **85,000 hours each year** giving vitamin B12 injections?

If **25% of patients**, who no longer need injections, safely switched to simple diet changes and over the counter bought vitamin B12 supplements, it could free up **21,250 hours** of practice time each year, including:

- **5,208 hours** of administration time
- **8,870 hours** of nursing time
- **2,375 hours** of GP time
- **4,797 hours** of other clinical support time

This would save almost **£1 million (£956,375)** in practice staffing costs, plus a further **£174,716** in medicine costs.

The time and money saved could equate to:

- **35 more nurses** for a year, or
- **25,135 GP appointments**, or
- Around **89 knee replacement operations**.

By reviewing vitamin B12 treatment and ensuring prescription vitamin B12 is only used when it is clinically needed, we can improve patient care while making better use of valuable NHS time and resources.

The '**Boost Your B12**' campaign aims to raise awareness among patients and healthcare professionals about dietary changes and safe and effective over the counter vitamin B12 options. The campaign supports simpler, safer and more consistent care, helping patients manage mild or diet-related low vitamin B12 themselves where appropriate, while ensuring NHS treatment and injections are focused on patients who need them most.

Why switch to over the counter (OTC) vitamin B12 tablets?

- Safe and effective for many people with low vitamin B12
- Avoids unnecessary injections and needle discomfort
- More convenient than regular GP or nurse appointments
- Easy to buy from pharmacies and supermarkets
- Helps NHS services focus on patients who can't absorb B12 properly and require injections

Campaign aims

- Raise awareness of safe and effective OTC vitamin B12 options
- Reduce unnecessary use of injectable vitamin B12
- Support patients with information to help manage mild or diet-related low vitamin B12 themselves
- Promote consistent care in line with NICE NG239 and local guidance
- Increase GP practice capacity

Key messages

- Many people can manage low vitamin B12 with simple dietary changes and OTC tablets instead of injections
- Pharmacy-bought vitamin B12 is safe, effective and easy to access for suitable patients
- Vitamin B12 injections are only needed when the body cannot absorb vitamin B12 properly
- Self-care can save time, reduce appointments and improve convenience

Website copy (for GP practices) Vitamin B12 - Important Update

Did you know that many people with low vitamin B12 can now be treated with simple dietary changes and over-the-counter vitamin tablets instead of regular injections?

Vitamin B12 levels can often be improved by eating more foods that naturally contain vitamin B12. These include meat such as beef, lamb, pork, chicken and turkey, fish such as salmon, trout, tuna, sardines, mackerel and cod, and shellfish including mussels, crab and clams. Other good sources are eggs, milk, cheese and yoghurt. Liver and kidney are very high in vitamin B12 but should be eaten in moderation as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

People who follow a vegetarian or vegan diet can get vitamin B12 from foods that have been fortified with the vitamin. These include some breakfast cereals, plant-based milks such as soya, oat and almond, nutritional yeast, some meat-free products and some dairy alternatives, including yoghurts.

Vitamin B12 supplements can be bought from pharmacies and supermarkets and are safe and effective for lots of people. New NHS guidance says that vitamin B12 tablets, or over-the-counter supplements, can work well - especially when:

- low vitamin B12 is caused by diet, or
- the body can still absorb vitamin B12 normally.

Making these simple dietary changes and using over the counter supplements means some patients may no longer need to visit their GP surgery for injections.

However, injections are still very important for some people. This includes people with conditions like:

- pernicious anaemia,
- or certain stomach or bowel problems that stop the body absorbing vitamin B12 properly.

But for many others, switching from injections to dietary changes and tablets could be an easier and more convenient option.

What This Means for You

If you have low vitamin B12, your practice may review your treatment to check if injections are still needed.

Social media

Please tag us in your social media posts **#BoostYourB12** **#HereToHelp**

Facebook - NorthEastandNorthCumbriaNHS

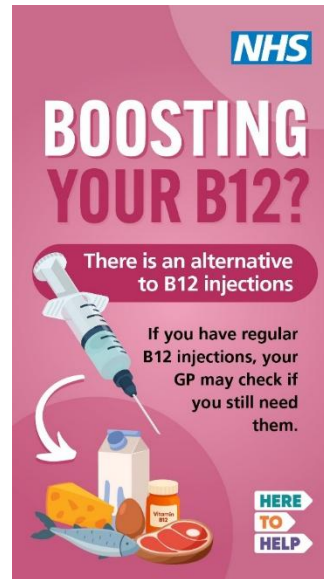
X – @NENC_NHS

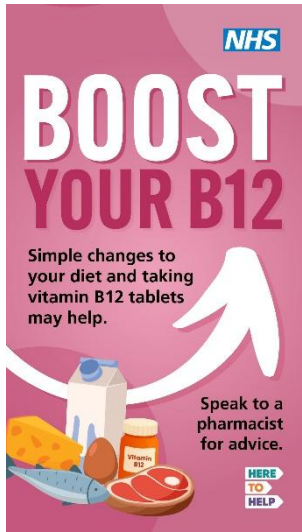
Instagram – nenc_nhs

TikTok - @nenc_icb

Linked-In - @north-east-and-north-cumbria-nhs

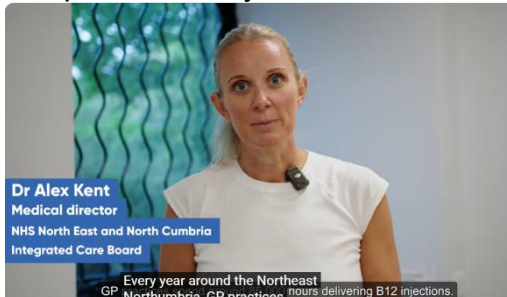
YouTube - North East and North Cumbria NHS

B12 Boost			
	Facebook/Instagram	X	Visual/video (Visuals for example only)
1.	📍 Boosting your B12? Many people with low vitamin B12 can be treated with simple diet changes and over-the-counter vitamin tablets instead of regular injections. ✅ Vitamin B12 tablets from a pharmacy or supermarket are safe and work. 👍 They're easy to take, and switching from injections to tablets could be a more convenient option for many people. 🏠 If you have vitamin B12 injections, your GP practice will review your treatment to check what's right for you. #NHS #HereToHelp	📍 Boosting your B12? Many people can be treated with simple diet changes and vitamin B12 tablets from a pharmacy or supermarket instead of regular injections. ✅ Tablets are a safe, effective and convenient option for many people. 🏠 If you currently get vitamin B12 injections, your GP practice will review your treatment to make sure you're receiving the right care. #NHS #HereToHelp	 The poster is pink with the NHS logo at the top. The title 'BOOSTING YOUR B12?' is in large white letters. Below it, a white syringe is shown with a curved arrow pointing to a collection of food items: a wedge of cheese, a carton of milk, a brown egg, a small jar of jam, and a slice of citrus fruit. A text box says 'There is an alternative to B12 injections'. Another text box says 'If you have regular B12 injections, your GP may check if you still need them.' At the bottom right is a 'HERE TO HELP' logo.

4.	⚡ Boost your B12! 😓 Feeling tired or run down? Low vitamin B12 can leave you feeling tired, weak and struggling to concentrate. 🥗 Simple changes to your diet and 💊 over-the-counter vitamin B12 tablets from your local pharmacy may help. 🗣️ Speak to your pharmacist for more advice. #HereToHelp	⚡ Boost your B12! 😓 Feeling tired or run down? Low vitamin B12 can cause tiredness, weakness and difficulty concentrating. 🥗 Simple diet changes and 💊 over-the-counter vitamin B12 tablets from your local pharmacy may help. 🗣️ Speak to your pharmacist for advice. #HereToHelp	
5.	⚡ Boost your B12! 😓 Low vitamin B12 can leave you feeling tired, weak and struggling to concentrate. 🥚🐟🥛 Did you know foods like eggs, fish, milk, cheese and yoghurt are packed with vitamin B12? 🌱 If you're vegan, fortified cereals and plant-based milks can help too. 💊 Need an extra boost? Ask your pharmacist about vitamin B12 tablets. #HereToHelp	⚡ Boost your B12! 😓 Low vitamin B12 can cause tiredness, weakness and difficulty concentrating. 🥚🐟🥛 Foods such as eggs, fish, milk, cheese and yoghurt are rich in vitamin B12. 🌱 If you're vegan, fortified cereals and plant-based milks can help too. 💊 Need an extra boost? Ask your pharmacist about vitamin B12 tablets. #HereToHelp	

6.	⚡ Feeling low on energy? ♥ Give your B12 a boost. Vitamin B12 plays an important role in keeping your body healthy. It's found in foods like meat, fish, eggs and dairy products, and some people may benefit from pharmacy or supermarket bought vitamin B12 supplements. 🍖 🐟 🥚 🥛 👤 Speak to your local pharmacy for expert advice. #NHS #HereToHelp	⚡ Feeling low on energy? ♥ Give your B12 a boost. Vitamin B12 helps keep your body healthy and is found in foods such as meat, fish, eggs and dairy products. 🍖 🐟 🥚 🥛 Some people may also benefit from pharmacy or supermarket bought vitamin B12 supplements . 👤 Speak to your local pharmacy for expert advice. #NHS #HereToHelp	 The poster features the NHS logo at the top. Below it, the text 'BOOST YOUR B12' is written in large, bold, white letters on a pink background. Underneath, it says 'Simple changes to your diet and taking vitamin B12 tablets may help.' with a large white arrow pointing upwards. At the bottom, there are illustrations of a carton of milk, a piece of cheese, a fish, an egg, and a glass of orange juice. To the right of these, it says 'Speak to a pharmacist for advice.' and a small 'HERE TO HELP' logo.
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B12 Boost video –

1.	https://youtu.be/VP_b85p88tA - 49 seconds	Dr Alex Kent – Introduction to Boost Your B12 campaign	For GP practices only  The video frame shows Dr Alex Kent, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a white t-shirt. She is speaking. A blue overlay on the left identifies her as 'Dr Alex Kent, Medical director, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board'. At the bottom, a black overlay with white text reads: 'Every year around the Northeast GP Northumbria, GP practices hours delivering B12 injections.'
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Additional assets

Posters / GP
waiting room
screens



Leaflet

NHS

Vitamin B12 Information for patients

This leaflet is for people who have low vitamin B12 levels, may benefit from self-care, or may no longer need vitamin B12 injections.

What is vitamin B12?

Vitamin B12 is a vitamin your body needs to stay healthy. It helps to:

- Keep your nerves healthy
- Support memory and concentration
- Make red blood cells

If your vitamin B12 level is low, you may:

- Feel very tired or weak
- Very low vitamin B12 levels can sometimes cause nerve problems.

What causes low vitamin B12?

Some people do not get enough vitamin B12 from their diet.

If your low vitamin B12 is caused by your diet, you may be able to improve your levels by eating more foods that contain vitamin B12.

Good sources of vitamin B12 include:

- Meat
- Fish and shellfish
- Milk, cheese and yoghurt
- Eggs

Vegan foods with added vitamin B12:

- Cati, soya and rice milks
- Breakfast cereals
- Marmite
- Fortified soya yoghurts and spreads

You can also buy vitamin B12 tablets from pharmacies and supermarkets.

When is treatment needed?

Some people can't absorb vitamin B12 properly from food or tablets. These people may need treatment from the NHS. This can happen if you:

- Have had stomach or bowel surgery
- Have inflammatory bowel disease
- Have a condition like pernicious anaemia
- Take certain medicines for a long time, such as metformin or acid tablets

Treatment options

Vitamin B12 tablets work well if your body can absorb the vitamin properly. These can usually be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or supermarket.

Vitamin B12 injections are given at your GP surgery. They are usually only needed if you have pernicious anaemia or your body cannot absorb vitamin B12 properly.

Why is my GP stopping vitamin B12 injections?

Vitamin B12 injections should only be given when tablets or changes to your diet are unlikely to work. Many people are having injections when they may no longer need them or when self-care may be a better option.

If your body can absorb vitamin B12 normally, tablets or diet changes are often enough to keep your levels healthy.

Do I need a blood test?

- Healthy people do not usually need a vitamin B12 blood test.
- Your GP may suggest a blood test in some situations.
- Most people do not need regular blood tests once treatment has started.
- Your doctor may review you if your symptoms do not get better.

When should I get help?

Speak to your GP practice or pharmacist if your symptoms change. They can advise on the best treatment for you.

Press release –

Thousands to be offered simpler alternative to B12 injections under new NHS guidance

People who receive regular vitamin B12 injections across the North East and North Cumbria could soon be offered a simpler alternative.

NHS clinicians say many people with low vitamin B12 could safely manage their condition with simple changes to their diet and vitamin B12 tablets bought from local pharmacies and supermarkets, helping them avoid repeated trips to their GP surgery.

Vitamin B12 helps keep nerves healthy, supports memory and concentration, and helps the body make red blood cells. Low levels can leave people feeling tired, weak and lacking energy.

NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) is currently the fourth highest prescriber of injectable vitamin B12 in England, with more than 50,000 people across the region currently receiving prescribed injections.

Health experts say many injections are being given to people who could be treated just as effectively with simple diet changes and over the counter bought vitamin B12 tablets.

Professor Ewan Maule, director of medicines, NHS North East and North Cumbria ICB, said: "Many people are surprised to learn that diet changes and vitamin B12 tablets can work just as well as injections for people whose bodies can absorb vitamin B12 normally.

"For suitable patients, switching to tablets can be much easier, more convenient and means fewer trips to the GP surgery. It also helps us make sure NHS appointments are available for patients who need them most."

GP practices across the region currently spend around 85,000 hours each year giving vitamin B12 injections.

Switching just one in four people, who no longer need injections, to pharmacy or supermarket bought vitamin tablets and simple dietary changes, could free up more than 21,000 hours of practice time each year.

This could support the equivalent of 25,000 GP appointments and allow practice staff to spend more time caring for patients with greater clinical need.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance supports the use of vitamin B12 tablets for many patients, particularly where low vitamin B12 is linked to diet or where the body can still absorb the vitamin properly.

Professor Maule added: "This isn't about stopping treatment. It's about making sure people receive the right treatment.

"People with conditions such as pernicious anaemia, or other problems that stop the body absorbing vitamin B12, will continue to receive B12 injections and monitoring, but for many others, diet changes and vitamin tablets are a safe and effective option."

GP practices across the region will review patients currently receiving vitamin B12 injections and contact them if a different treatment may be more appropriate.

People are also being encouraged to speak to their local pharmacist for advice about vitamin B12 supplements and ways to increase vitamin B12 through their diet.

Vitamin B12 is found naturally in foods such as meat, fish, eggs and dairy products. People who follow a vegetarian or vegan diet can get vitamin B12 from foods that have been fortified including breakfast cereals, plant-based milks such as soya, oat and almond, nutritional yeast, some meat-free products and dairy-free alternatives.

For more information on vitamin B12, speak to your GP practice or local pharmacist.

Ends