

# Introduction

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1. The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) last considered the maternal diet and nutrition in relation to offspring health in its reports on 'The influence of maternal, foetal and child nutrition on the development of chronic disease in later life' (SACN, 2011) and on 'Feeding in the first year of life' (SACN, 2018). In the latter report, the impact of breastfeeding on maternal health was also considered. In 2019, SACN agreed to conduct a risk assessment on nutrition and maternal health, focusing on maternal outcomes during pregnancy, childbirth and up to 24 months after delivery.

2. SACN agreed that, where appropriate, other expert committees would be consulted and asked to complete relevant risk assessments. A provisional list of chemicals was proposed by SACN Members. However, this was subject to change following discussion by the COT. A scoping paper was presented to the Committee (TOX/2020/45) to define the scope of the work from a toxicological

safety perspective and request their input on the selection of candidate chemicals or chemical classes that could be added or removed.

3. As part of this work, the Committee decided it would be useful to consider the use of dietary supplements during pregnancy. A scoping paper (TOX/2020/51) was presented, reviewing the dietary supplements commonly used during pregnancy. These supplements are not officially recommended by relevant health and regulatory authorities but are promoted by anecdotal evidence and unofficial sources as having various purported benefits.

4. The review was confined to herbal dietary supplements which would be regulated under food law, as opposed to traditional herbal medicines, which are overseen by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). Following this review, the COT suggested that *Echinacea* required further investigation, noting that both human and animal *in vitro* and *in vivo* data were available. The main areas of concern included general toxicity to the mother, effects on the development of the foetus or embryo and possible interactions with drugs.

5. Based on the COT's recommendations, a more extensive literature search was undertaken to evaluate the safety of *Echinacea* use during pregnancy and is presented below (for full details of the search method, see Annex A).