

Vitamin K for Newborn Babies



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This leaflet explains what vitamin K is and its importance in preventing bleeding problems in newborn babies. We hope it gives you enough information to help you make an informed choice about this part of your baby's care.

What is Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is a substance which the body needs for blood clotting. It occurs naturally in food. It is also produced by friendly bacteria in our gut. We all need it as it helps to make our blood clot and to prevent bleeding problems. Newborn Babies have low levels of vitamin K. This puts them at risk of a rare but serious and potentially life-threatening condition known as vitamin K deficiency bleeding.

How do low levels of vitamin K affect a newborn baby?

A small number of babies suffer bleeding problems due to a shortage of vitamin K. The condition is known as Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB). This usually occurs within the first week of life where a baby can bleed from its nose, mouth or from the umbilical cord.

Babies can experience late onset VKDB which occurs after three weeks of age. This can cause bleeding into the gut or the brain and in some cases cause brain damage or death. VKDB occurs in one in every 8,500 full term babies if no vitamin K supplement is given. In the whole of the UK, if no vitamin K supplement was given, 10 to 20 of the 800,000 babies born each year might be brain damaged because of a bleed into the brain, and about five babies would die of this condition.

How can Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding be prevented?

The recommendation is for all babies to be offered vitamin K post birth to reduce the chances of VKDB. The most effective treatment is to administer a single dose of vitamin K injected into the thigh muscle shortly after birth.



Vitamin K can also be administered orally and can be effective in most cases, but your baby needs to have several doses. Oral vitamin K doses are not effective for all babies.

Breastfed babies will receive oral doses at: At birth, 7-10 days and at one month.
Breastmilk contains very little vitamin K and therefore does not prevent VKDB. Most cases in the UK occur in breastfed babies who have not had any supplements or have not completed a full course of oral vitamin K.

Bottle fed babies receive two oral doses at birth and at 7-10 days.

This is because formula milk has added vitamin K. Formula fed babies with liver problems can be at higher risk of VKDB as they do not absorb vitamin K well from the milk.

When do I need to decide about my baby receiving Vitamin K?

During pregnancy you should consider whether your baby should receive vitamin K and what route you would like it to be administered. The midwife caring for you in labour will also discuss your wishes.

If you make the choice to decline Vitamin K for your baby

If you decide to decline vitamin K for your baby, it's important to note that in most cases there are no warning signs.

VKDB is preventable by giving baby vitamin K at birth via intramuscular injection and for this reason Frimley Health recommend this treatment for all babies.

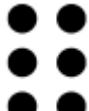
Warning signs

If you decide to decline vitamin K for your baby, it's important to note that in most cases there are no warning signs.

You should seek immediate medical help if:

- Bleeding from nose, mouth or umbilical cord
- Easy bruising especially around head and face
- Jaundice after 3 weeks of age
- Blood in the stool, black stool or vomiting blood
- Irritability, seizures, excessive sleepiness

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