



Vitamin K for Newborns

What is vitamin K?

Vitamin K is used by your body to help blood clot and stop bleeding. We get a small amount of vitamin K from the food we eat. Most vitamin K we use is made by good bacteria that live in our intestines (gut). Without enough vitamin K, cuts can bleed for a long time and small injuries can cause big bruises. If there is a serious problem, bleeding can happen in other parts of the body like the brain or intestines.

What is the vitamin K shot?

Babies are born with very small amounts of vitamin K in their bodies because vitamin K does not cross through the placenta from a mother to her baby. The bacteria that make vitamin K are not in your baby's intestines at birth, so your baby's body can't make vitamin K right away. Breast milk has very little vitamin K. Therefore, it is recommended that all newborn babies get a shot of vitamin K in their leg in the hours after birth. This shot gives your baby the vitamin K needed to help blood clot until your baby's body starts making vitamin K.

Why do newborns need a vitamin K shot?

Newborns who do not receive the vitamin K shot can have extra bleeding that can be mild or severe. If babies do not get the vitamin K shot, 1 in every 59 to 250 babies will have bleeding problems for up to 6 months of age. The vitamin K shot greatly lowers the chance of bleeding in the first weeks after birth. Babies who receive the vitamin K shot have a 1 in 100,000 chance of having this type of bleeding.

What are the warning signs of bleeding problems due to vitamin K deficiency?

In most cases when bleeding problems happen from not having enough vitamin K, there are no warning signs before serious bleeding starts. You should call your baby's health care provider or go to the emergency department if your baby has any of these problems:

- New bruises on the head, face, or any body part
- Yellow eyes after your baby is 3 weeks old
- Bleeding from the umbilical cord or nose
- Lots of vomiting, especially if it contains blood
- Blood in your baby's stool—this blood can be red, or the stools can be dark and tar-like
- Very pale skin or if your baby has dark skin, very pale gums
- Irritability or extreme sleepiness
- Seizures

Are there any risks to the vitamin K shot?

The vitamin K shot has been given to newborn babies in the United States and Europe since the 1960s. Many large studies have been done to see if there are any problems from the shot. None of those studies has found any major problems from giving babies this shot at birth. The most common problem is a small amount of soreness where the shot was given.

Can I eat more foods with vitamin K to help my baby get more through breastfeeding?

Vitamin K that you get from the food you eat is not easily passed through your breast milk. Increasing your intake of vitamin K does not increase the amount of vitamin K in your breast milk to the levels needed by your baby.



Can my baby have vitamin K drops instead of a shot?

Vitamin K drops that are given to your baby by mouth, instead of the vitamin K shot, are not recommended in the United States. Studies have shown the vitamin K shot works much better in preventing bleeding problems than the drops. In other countries that use vitamin K drops, more babies have bleeding problems than in countries that use the shot.

If my baby is drinking formula, is the vitamin K shot still needed?

Yes, even though formula has some added vitamin K, it still can take up to a week for your baby to have enough vitamin K to help blood clot well and prevent bleeding problems.

If I wait to circumcise my son until the 8th day of his life, does he still need the vitamin K shot?

Waiting 8 days to have your son circumcised is not enough to protect him from extra bleeding.

What do I do if I want my baby to receive the vitamin K shot?

Most birth places will offer the vitamin K shot in the first hours after your baby is born. You will probably not have to sign a consent form for this shot. All birth locations should have a plan in place to give babies the vitamin K shot at birth. Check with your health care provider and to make sure your baby will be offered the vitamin K shot.

What if I do not want my baby to get the vitamin K shot?

If you do not want your baby to get the vitamin K shot, you may need to sign a form that states you know the chance your baby might have bleeding, and you do not want your baby to have a vitamin K shot. Although it is rare, some babies who do not get this shot will have serious bleeding that can cause permanent problems or death. If your baby does not get the vitamin K shot soon after birth, let your baby's health care provider know.

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Facts about vitamin K

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/vitamink/facts.html>

Frequently asked questions about vitamin K

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/vitamink/faqs.html>

Podcasts talking about vitamin K

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/vitamink/multimedia.html>

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