



Vitamin K and Your Baby

This leaflet explains why we advise for Vitamin K to be given to your baby. If you have any questions, please speak to your doctor or nurse who will be happy to help you.

What is Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is a natural vitamin found in our bodies. In adults, Vitamin K is found in green leafy vegetables and produced by the gut. Vitamin K is necessary for blood to clot and stop bleeding.

Why does my baby need Vitamin K?

In newborn babies, the body does not have enough Vitamin K. Without enough Vitamin K, babies can develop bleeding, ranging from bruising to life-threatening bleeding (Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding [VKDB]).

If a baby develops VKDB, he/she may have

- Bleeding from umbilical stump, urine, gut, nose, mouth, etc
- Bruises
- Internal bleeding, e.g. in the brain, which can lead to permanent brain injury or even death

VKDB is preventable by giving newborn babies extra vitamin K.

Is my baby at risk?

ALL newborn babies are at risk of VKDB as they have low levels of vitamin K.

Some babies have even higher risk:

- Premature (<37 weeks)
- Vacuum or forceps delivery
- Unwell / sick baby
- Feeding problems
- Completely breastfed as formula milk often contain added vitamin K. However, breastmilk is still the ideal milk for your baby
- Has a procedure done e.g. circumcision
- Mothers who are on certain medications, such as medications to prevent seizures or treat tuberculosis

How is Vitamin K given?

The best method is to give your baby a single injection of vitamin K in the thigh after birth.

An alternative is to give your baby oral Vitamin K by mouth. However, this may be less reliable and effective. Oral Vitamin K requires 3 doses – at birth, at 1 week of life and at 1 month of life.

You are strongly encouraged to allow your baby to have this simple treatment. Babies who do not get Vitamin K at birth are at 81 times higher risk of developing VKDB.

Is Vitamin K harmful?

There was a concern in the 1990s of a link between Vitamin K supplementation and leukaemia or other cancers. However, subsequent follow-up studies found no evidence to support this.