



Vitamin K for Newborn Babies

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What is Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is a nutrient that we get from certain foods and is used by the liver to make **special proteins** that help blood clot.

Why is vitamin K important for my baby?

Newborn babies have low levels of vitamin K at birth compared to older children and adults and therefore may be at risk of a bleeding disorder known as **vitamin K deficiency bleeding (VKDB)**. This is a condition where your baby's blood cannot clot properly meaning they bleed very easily. Your doctor or midwife may also call this condition **haemorrhagic disease of the newborn**.

Once feeding is established, baby can obtain vitamin K like we can.

How common is VKDB?

VKDB occurs in about 1 in 10,000 babies. This is why we suggest your baby gets additional vitamin K as this helps to prevent VKDB. By giving your baby just one vitamin K injection, the risk is essentially eradicated.

We strongly recommend that your baby has a vitamin K injection as soon as possible after birth to help prevent vitamin K deficiency bleeding.

What is the injection like?

We give a **1mg vitamin K intramuscular injection**. This is a small injection into your baby's thigh muscle, using a thin needle.

I don't like the idea of an injection, are there any other options?

We can give your baby vitamin K by mouth at birth and your baby would need **2 further doses** of **vitamin K** one in the first week after birth and one at a month old. If you are artificially feeding, your baby won't need a dose at one month.

Are there any side effects?

We don't know conclusively whether there are any side effects from giving vitamin K but the research so far shows no evidence of any. Like any injection, there is a small risk of bleeding or irritation at the site the vitamin k is given.

Is there anything my midwife will want to know before I choose?

There are some things that affect your baby's risk of VKDB. You should tell your midwife if:

- You have been taking any medication during your pregnancy, especially anticonvulsants (e.g carbamazepine) or blood-thinning drugs (e.g warfarin, heparin)
- If you have any conditions that affect the liver or bowel that may be passed on to your baby (hepatitis, cystic fibrosis, alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency)

Do I need to do anything now?

If you strongly feel you do not want your baby to have a vitamin K injection, tell your midwife so she can discuss the available options with you and what to look out for in baby in the first few weeks after birth.

Where can I get more information?

Ask your midwife or doctor if you have any more concerns about vitamin K deficiency bleeding or want more information to help you decide about giving it to your baby.