

Vitamin K for Your Baby

Vitamin K is needed to help blood clot (clump together to stop bleeding).

All newborn babies have very low levels of vitamin K. Several months after birth, babies start to make their own vitamin K. Before they make their own, however, they are at risk for bleeding suddenly. This is called vitamin K deficiency bleeding (VKDB).

This bleeding occurs between birth and 6 months of age and often starts without an injury. It can be serious and lead to brain damage or death. Once the bleeding starts, it can be impossible to heal the damage, even if the bleeding can be stopped.

The amount of vitamin K your baby will get in the shot is higher than the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for oral vitamin K. The injected vitamin K dose is not absorbed all at once and therefore lasts longer to protect your baby for several months.

Please consider the information about this vitamin and ask your baby's health care team for more details so you can make a decision about giving vitamin K to your baby.

What is known about VKDB and giving the vitamin K injection?

- Vitamin K is a vitamin. There are no known side effects to giving a vitamin K injection. As with any shot, the area may be red or sore after the shot is given.
- Vitamin K is not a vaccine.
- Bleeding from not having enough vitamin K can happen in any baby. It is not limited to babies who had trauma during birth or baby boys who are circumcised.
- It takes months for babies to make enough vitamin K to prevent bleeding. Waiting 8 days to have your son circumcised or to have any procedures on a baby boy or girl cannot protect your baby from bleeding.
- Boys and girls can both be affected.
- Vitamin K injections are not linked to cancers. This has been confirmed by research studies.
- Vitamin K is usually given right after your baby is born, while your baby is skin-to-skin with you.
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center uses a preservative-free vitamin K.

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- Vitamin K taken by mouth does not work as well as the shot to prevent bleeding. The reasons that oral vitamin K does not work as well may be that:
 - the baby’s stomach is not able to absorb it
 - several doses are needed over a 3-month time period and sometimes parents do not complete the doses
 - it is hard to know if a baby has swallowed all of an oral dose of medicine.

Some other countries have changed to oral vitamin K and, in those countries, more babies have vitamin K deficiency bleeding.

Oral vitamin K is not approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to prevent VKDB.

What about increasing vitamin K through mom’s diet and breast milk?

Mom cannot increase vitamin K inside her baby by eating leafy greens or taking vitamin K during pregnancy.

Adding foods high in vitamin K to mom’s diet while breastfeeding cannot give enough vitamin K to her baby to lower the risk of vitamin K deficiency bleeding.

What is the history of giving vitamin K shots to babies?

Since the 1960s, vitamin K has been a standard in newborn care. Before that time, babies did survive without vitamin K shots, but more babies died then, too. Vitamin K deficiency bleeding was likely a cause of some of those deaths. The infant mortality rate is dramatically lower now and we know that giving a vitamin K shot helps more babies survive.

If you refuse vitamin K for your baby, you must sign a refusal form at the hospital. We will talk with you and ask you to rethink your decision.

We urge you to have the vitamin K injection as part of your birth plan.