

Vitamin K in Newborns

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<http://www.hpakids.org/holistic-health/articles/143/1/Vitamin-K-in-Newborns>

An injection of vitamin K (1.0 mg) is routinely administered to all newborns to prevent unexpected bleeding caused by low levels of vitamin K-dependent blood clotting factors. Vitamin K is present in green vegetables, vegetable oils, and dairy products, but intake or supplementation during pregnancy does not ensure prevention of vitamin K deficiency in newborns.

The syndrome of vitamin K deficiency bleeding occurs in approximately 1 in 10,000 babies. Hemorrhagic disease that occurs from week 2-12 of life is the most dangerous form. Half of these affected babies suffer sudden bleeding into the brain, and 20 percent of affected babies die. Studies have shown that a single injection or oral dose of vitamin K at birth results in adequate coagulation status and vitamin K levels for up to three months following birth.

Injected vitamin K ran into a problem when researchers in 1990 noted an increased incidence of childhood cancer in children given vitamin K injections at birth. Specifically, they found that injected vitamin K doubled the incidence of leukemia in children less than ten years of age. A subsequent study in 1992 revealed the same association between injected vitamin K and cancer, but no such association with oral vitamin K. These researchers recommended exclusive use of oral vitamin K.

Since vitamin K given within 12 hours of birth can reduce the risk of vitamin K deficiency bleeding, it seems prudent to give an oral dose of 1-2 mg. Injections of vitamin K are painful and can cause bruising at the injection site. There may also be an increased risk of cancer associated with vitamin K injections.

Mothers should eat foods with high vitamin K content during pregnancy (green vegetables and dairy products) because vitamin K is transferred to the fetus across the placenta. Pregnant women can also take alfalfa tablets during pregnancy, a good source of vitamin K.

It is also advisable to give 1-2 mg. of vitamin K to breastfed infants at ages one to two weeks and at four weeks. Formulas are already supplemented with vitamin K. Alternatively, nursing mothers can take a daily dose of vitamin K during the first three months following birth. If nursing mothers take a daily 5 mg. vitamin K supplement their babies' vitamin K status improves through the first 12 weeks of life.

Although oral vitamin K is not licensed for use as a drug by the FDA, drops for oral administration are available. Typically, one drop contains 2 mg. of vitamin K. Contact a midwife in your area, or a birthing supply company (such as birthwithlove.com), or Scientific Botanicals (206 527-5521) where your health care provider can order liquid vitamin K directly.