

## What should I look out for?

You should always see your Doctor or Health Care Worker if:

- Your baby has any unexplained bleeding or bruising. This is particularly important if your baby has not had Vitamin K.
- When your baby is over 3 weeks old, there are any signs of jaundice (yellow colouring of the skin or whites of the eyes).

Babies with liver problems are particularly at risk, even if they have had Vitamin K.

## How do I get Vitamin K for my baby?

During your pregnancy your Doctor or Midwife should ask whether you want your baby to have Vitamin K by injection or by mouth and they will arrange to provide it.

Soon after birth, following discussion and agreement with yourself, your baby will have a Vitamin K injection or the first dose by mouth. This will be given by a Midwife or Doctor.

If you have chosen Vitamin K by mouth:

- The second oral dose can be given when they are having their newborn blood screening test by your local Doctor or Midwife. You need to remember the important third oral dose when your baby is 4 weeks old. Talk to your Doctor or Midwife if you need help or advice.

Make sure that your baby's Vitamin K doses are recorded in the baby's personal health record (red book).

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### Why is Vitamin K important for my baby?

Vitamin K helps blood to clot. It is essential to prevent serious bleeding. Babies do not get enough Vitamin K from their mothers during pregnancy, or when they are breast feeding. Without Vitamin K, they are at risk of getting a rare disorder called haemorrhagic disease of the newborn which can cause bleeding into the brain and may result in brain damage or even death. This can be prevented by giving new babies extra Vitamin K. By the age of about 6 months, they have built up their own supply.

### How is Vitamin K given?

The easiest and most reliable way, as highlighted by current research, is to give babies Vitamin K by injection. One injection just after birth will protect a baby for many months. The Senior Paediatricians and Senior Midwives at the Ulster Hospital recommend this option.

Vitamin K can also be given by mouth although this is a less effective route as several oral doses are essential to give enough protection, because Vitamin K is not absorbed as well when it is given by mouth and the effect does not last as long. If you choose Vitamin K by mouth, your baby needs to have 3 doses.

**Dose 1** at birth

**Dose 2** usually at 4 - 7 days old, and

**Dose 3** in the 4th week, if the baby is fully breast fed.

(Babies fed mainly by formula do not need the 3rd dose).

If your baby vomits within 1 hour of swallowing the Vitamin K, the baby will need to have another dose.

### Can all babies have Vitamin K?

All babies need to have Vitamin K. Very small or premature babies may need smaller doses - your Doctor can advise you about this.

Vitamin K by mouth is not suitable for some babies:

- Babies who are premature or sick should be given the Vitamin by injection as they have lower levels of Vitamin K and are at higher risk of haemorrhagic disease of the newborn
- If you choose Vitamin K by mouth but your baby is unwell when a dose is due, the baby may need to have the injection instead.
- If, while you were pregnant you took medication for epilepsy, blood clots or tuberculosis, you should tell your Doctor or Midwife. Your baby may not be able to absorb Vitamin K by mouth and may need the injection instead.

### Does Vitamin K have any side effects?

A few years ago, one study suggested that injections of Vitamin K might be linked to childhood cancer, but 6 studies since could not find any link with cancer. A review of data from the UK Children's Cancer Study Group in 2003 has concluded that Vitamin K is not associated with childhood cancer or leukaemia, whether it is given by injection or by mouth.

### Does my baby have to have Vitamin K?

This is your choice. However, giving Vitamin K to your newborn baby is a simple way of preventing a very serious disease.

The Department of Health strongly recommends that all babies be given Vitamin K. This includes babies who are premature or sick and babies having surgery (including circumcision).

Parents who decide against Vitamin K need to watch very carefully for any symptoms of haemorrhagic disease of the newborn.