

VITAMIN K FOR YOUR BABY?

Compiled by Birth Matters Consumer and Support Group, February 2005.

Prior to your baby's birth, your maternity care provider should discuss with you whether you wish your baby to receive a dose of Vitamin K once it is born.

“How do I decide if this intervention is right for me and my child and how do I get more information?”
you ask.

Vitamin K (sold also as Konakian or Phytomenadione) has been given routinely to newborns since the 1970's and is thought to reduce the incidence of haemorrhagic disease of the newborn (HDN) or Vitamin K deficiency bleeding (VKDB). Vitamin K can be administered via intra muscular injection or orally.

The incidence of this condition is not certain and published numbers vary. The SA Department of Health states the incidence is “probably one case in 200-300 if not treated” (presumably ‘treatment’ being prophylactic administration of Vitamin K to all babies).

There is not a great amount of research available about the administration of Vitamin K to newborns despite this being a common practice over the last few decades.

It is known infants have a lower level of Vitamin K in their blood than adults.

Vitamin K is necessary to form clotting factors to stop bleeding.

The World Health Organisation, in their publication ‘Postpartum Care of Mother and Newborn: A Practical Guide’, classifies routine administration of Vitamin K to all healthy newborns or all newborns that will be breastfed as a “practice for which insufficient evidence exists to support a clear recommendation and which should be used with caution while further research clarifies this issue.”

Product information is available from Roche Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of Konakian MM Paediatric.

You may ask your holistic health practitioner to advise on measures to increase your Vitamin K intake if you are concerned.

Speak to other parents about how they came to decide on this intervention. Remember, your decision needs to feel right for you and your baby. There is no medical treatment which is compulsory and your consent may depend on your circumstances at the time
(i.e. when and how your baby is born, your health history, how your baby is fed).

Resources

Sara Wickham ‘Vitamin K and the newborn’ available from Birth International www.acegraphics.com.au (\$19.95)

National Health and Medical Research Council (Oct 2000) ‘Joint Statement and Recommendations on Vitamin K administration to newborn infants to prevent Vitamin K deficiency bleeding in infancy.’ Copy available Birth Matters Library or see link via www.dhs.sa.gov.au/pregnancy

Enkin, M , Keirse, M et al (2000) A Guide to Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth 3rd Ed. Oxford Press, UK. Page 420.

Slattery, J British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology 1996 Vol 103, No 5 pp 400-401. ‘Treating all babies with vitamin K: an ‘unnatural’ policy?’

Yarnley, Sally MIDIRS Midwifery Digest Sep 1992 2:3 p363 ‘What would you do? Vitamin K’.

UK Midwifery Archives. Discussion from Midwifery Matters, Winter 1999, Issue No 83

NHMRC ‘Vitamin K For Newborn Babies’ pamphlet, 2000

Handel, J & Tripp, J 1991. ‘Vitamin K prophylaxis against haemorrhagic disease of the newborn in the United Kingdom’.

von Kries, R 1998. ‘Neonatal Vitamin K prophylaxis: the Gordian knot still awaits untying.’ British Medical Journal 1998 Vol 316 p161-162