Facts about Vitamin K[1]

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Why do we need vitamin K?

Vitamin K is one of the fat-soluble vitamins. It helps the body make proteins that are needed for normal blood clotting. Vitamin K is also needed for making important bone proteins.

What happens if we don't get enough vitamin K?

When people don't get enough vitamin K blood takes a long time to clot. This can cause excessive blood loss and increased risk of death from injuries. Vitamin K deficiency is rare in healthy adults. However, people with severe digestive disorders or on chronic antibiotic therapy may be at risk (1).

Anticoagulant medications such as warfarin (Coumadin®) are prescribed to interfere with normal function of vitamin K in the body. Eating very large or very small amounts of vitamin K can change how these drugs work.

If you take an anticoagulant, you should pay close attention to your intake of foods such as spinach and turnip greens that are very high in vitamin K, and ensure that your vitamin K intake is about the same from day to day. You should also consult your doctor before taking vitamin E supplements, or supplements such as ginkgo and garlic, as these may also affect blood clotting.

Figure 1. Vitamin K is mostly found in vegetables, especially green vegetables such as turnip greens. Credits: ColognePhotos/iStock/Thinkstock, © ColognePhotos

How much vitamin K do we need?

The table lists the recommended intakes for vitamin K (2).

Table 1.

Life Stage	Amount (µg/day)
Men, ages 19+	120
Women, ages 19+	90
Pregnancy	90
Breastfeeding	90
µg = micrograms of vitamin K	

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How can we get enough vitamin K?

Vitamin K is mostly found in vegetables, especially green vegetables. Kale, collards, spinach, broccoli, and cabbage contain high amounts of vitamin K. Other sources are soybean oil, strawberries, and whole milk. Below are some foods and the amount of vitamin K they contain (3).

Table 2.

Food	Vitamin K (µg/serving)
Kale, ½ cup	225
Spinach, raw, ½ cup	75
Turnip greens, ½ cup	70
Broccoli, ½ cup	45
Cabbage, ½ cup	30
Soybean oil, 1 Tbsp	25
Iceberg lettuce, 1 cup	14
Green beans, ½ cup	7
Strawberries, 1 cup	4
Whole milk, 1 cup	1
Egg, 1 large	<1
µg = micrograms Tbsp = tablespoons	

We also get some vitamin K from the bacteria that normally live in our large intestine. Our resident bacteria make vitamin K and we are able to absorb some of it.

Newborns have very little vitamin K in their bodies. They usually receive a shot of vitamin K soon after birth. This shot of vitamin K allows normal blood clotting to occur during the first weeks of life.

What about supplements?

Most people get plenty of vitamin K in their diet, so supplements are usually not needed. Water-soluble forms of the vitamin are manufactured and may be beneficial for people with problems in fat digestion and absorption. Multivitamin supplements are available with or without vitamin K. If you take an anti-coagulant, avoid supplements that contain vitamin K.

It is not known how much vitamin K is too much. Research has not found problems from consuming high intakes of vitamin K from food or supplements, except for people who take anticoagulant medications.

Learn More

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your county Extension office may have more written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. Also, a registered dietitian (RD) can provide you with reliable information.

Reliable nutrition information can be found at:

http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu

http://www.nutrition.gov

http://www.eatright.org

References

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