Your Health: Vitamin K

Your body needs vitamin K to clot blood and help keep your bones healthy. It is found in leafy green vegetables, meat, and dairy products. Your body also produces some vitamin K on its own.

Levels of vitamin K
Low levels of vitamin K are rare. Most people get plenty of vitamin K from the foods they eat. However, low levels can be caused by certain liver or intestinal problems.

If your vitamin K levels are too low, you may bruise or bleed easily.

Healthy bacteria in your intestine also make vitamin K. If you take antibiotics for a long time, they may destroy these bacteria and cut off this source of vitamin K. If you are on antibiotics for a long time, be sure to eat plenty of foods with vitamin K.

Vitamin K and warfarin
Vitamin K levels affect how warfarin, a blood-thinning medicine, works. Warfarin (such as Coumadin) is taken to prevent blood clots.

Vitamin K normally helps your blood clot so wounds don't bleed too much. Warfarin works against vitamin K, making your blood clot more slowly.

To ensure that warfarin is working well, it's important to eat about the same amount of vitamin K every day. This means you do not suddenly eat a lot more or a lot less of foods or drinks rich in vitamin K than you usually do.

Most people can eat a normal, healthy diet. It's up to you how much vitamin K you choose to eat. For example, if you already eat a lot of leafy green vegetables, that's fine. Just keep it about the same amount each day. And if you take a multivitamin that contains vitamin K, be sure you take it every day.

Check with your doctor before you make big changes in what you eat, such as starting a diet to lose weight.

Foods with vitamin K

Foods high in vitamin K:
- Cooked leafy green vegetables, such as kale, spinach, turnip greens, collard greens, Swiss chard, and mustard greens (1 serving is ½ cup)
- Fresh parsley (¼ cup)

If you take warfarin, you might limit these foods to 1 serving a day.

If you have questions about foods with vitamin K, ask if your doctor can refer you to a registered dietitian, an expert in healthy eating.
Foods moderately high in vitamin K:

- Fresh leafy green vegetables, such as raw spinach, green leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, and endive (1 serving is 1 cup)
- Raw broccoli (1 cup)
- Brussels sprouts (1/2 cup)

If you take warfarin, you might limit these foods to 3 servings a day.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.