

Multivitamin Supplementation in Newborns

Q. Multivitamin drops are routinely recommended for newborns even by pediatricians. Are they really needed?

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A. The use of routine multivitamin supplementation in newborns has been a raging debate for a long time. At present, American, Canadian and European guidelines for newborn feeding are available (1-3). However, with emergence of newer information, it is now possible to offer some rational guidelines for the use of multivitamins in the newborn.

In term breastfed infants, there is no evidence at present that they need any vitamin supplementation, as breast milk provides the infant's daily vitamin requirements.

In preterm infants fed exclusively human milk, available evidence suggests that there may be a need to supplement vitamins D (25 µg), B₆ (100 µg), C (20 mg), and folk acid (65 µg) in the indicated daily doses till they reach a corrected postnatal age of 36-37 weeks. The continuation of any vitamin supplements thereafter should be reconsidered.

In infants fed on fortified milk formula, there is no evidence to support the need for vitamin supplementation. In the case of

infants who are fed on non-formula animal milk (cow or buffalo milk), there are no studies that could help formulate guidelines. However, anecdotal experiences in term infants have not documented clinical vitamin deficiencies in infants fed on fresh animal milk without vitamin supplementation.

Present evidence suggests that preterm infants would need selected vitamin supplementation till they reach a corrected postnatal age of 37 weeks. But since there are no commercial multivitamin preparations that only provide Vitamins D, B₆, C and folk acid, one cannot avoid administering other vitamins not needed by the infant. Fortunately, the provision of these additional vitamins has not been documented to be toxic.

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