



# AL-SHIFA TRUST EYE HOSPITAL

## Vitamin A Deficiency

Vitamin A plays an important role in the growth & development of a child. It is vitally important for preservation of night vision. Usually small children are at risk. Poverty, large family size, inadequate child spacing, lack of adequate and balanced food combined with inadequate breast feeding and improper weaning, measles, chronic diarrhea etc. are the major precipitating factors.

### What are the symptoms of Vitamin A deficiency?

Usually the child remains ill with repeated attacks of respiratory tract infections (cough), diarrhea, fever, and is very weak or malnourished. When vitamin A deficiency becomes quite severe, the eye is involved and the child usually becomes inactive after dark because of night blindness. The child also develops a yellowish white, foamy spot over the white area of eyeball (Bitot's spot). It has been observed that when mothers apply "surma" (antimony powder) to the eyes of such a child, this spot becomes stained by surma ("surma Sign"). As the situation worsens, eye start watering and gradually the cornea (anterior part of the eye melts ways with ultimate loss of sight. Remember, all children with these symptoms are at the brink of death because not only will they become blind but will also suffer from much more serious diseases. In these circumstances, immediately consult any eye specialist.

### Prevention & treatment of Vitamin A deficiency

Vitamin A is found in abundance in dark green leafy vegetables, red palm oil, yellow fruits (mango, papaya), egg, milk and fish. Regular use of these gives the child enough Vitamin A. The pregnant mothers should also use these sources of vitamin A. Mothers should be encouraged to breast feed their children for full two years. Weaning should start at 4 months of age together with use of vitamin A containing foods. Every child must be vaccinated for measles by the age of 9 months. All the pregnant and lactating mothers at risk should also take the adequate dose of vitamin A after consulting the doctor. If you find one child with vitamin A deficiency, look for more children in that area. Vitamin A deficiency is life threatening and potentially blinding, save the life and sight of your child.

Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital  
Jhelum Road, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.  
Tel: 0092 51 5487820-24, Fax: 0092 51 5487827  
Email: [info@alshifaeye.org](mailto:info@alshifaeye.org)