

Prophylactic Measures to Prevent Eye Infection

In the late 1800s, it became standard to administer silver nitrate to the eyes of newborns as protection against gonococcal ophthalmia. No controlled studies have confirmed that this is the most effective means of preventing blindness. In fact, silver nitrate can actually cause chemical conjunctivitis, is not effective against Chlamydia, and is not more effective against gonococcal ophthalmia than tetracycline or erythromycin.

There are several other options that are becoming more commonly accepted including:

1. Watch carefully for signs of conjunctivitis or other infections and treat at once.
2. Wait for several hours (after early mother/baby bonding) and apply erythromycin.
3. Apply colostrums as an anti-bacterial agent directly in the eyes.

Resources:

Holistic Midwifery, Volume 1, 1998, Labrys Press.

A Guide to Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth, 2000, Oxford University Press.

Ina May's Guide to Childbirth, 2002, Random House.