

Keratomalacia is an eye (ocular) condition, usually affecting both eyes (bilateral), that results from severe deficiency of vitamin A. That deficiency may be dietary (i.e., intake) or metabolic (i.e., absorption). Vitamin A is essential for normal vision as well as proper bone growth, healthy skin, and protection of the mucous membranes of the digestive, respiratory, and urinary tracts against infection. Keratomalacia occurs most commonly in developing countries due to prolonged dietary deprivation of vitamin A or protein-calorie malnutrition. As noted above, keratomalacia is a major cause of blindness in young children in such areas. In developed countries, vitamin A deficiency most frequently occurs when there is interference with vitamin A intake, absorption, or transport.