

What Is Infantile Hemangioma?

Infantile hemangiomas (he-man-jee-O-muhs), sometimes called “strawberry marks,” are benign tumors formed from the overgrowth of blood vessels on or under the skin.

Symptoms

A hemangioma may be present at birth, but more often appears during the first several months of life. It starts out as a flat red mark anywhere on the body, most often on the face, scalp, chest or back. Usually a child has only one mark. Some children may have more than one, particularly if they're part of a multiple birth.

During your child's first year, the red mark grows rapidly (proliferation) and becomes a spongy mass that protrudes from the skin. The hemangioma then enters a rest phase and then eventually slowly starts to improve over a span of up to 9 years.

While most infantile hemangiomas go away on their own in time, others can lead to permanent scarring if left untreated:

- 1 out of 3 facial infantile hemangiomas will result in disfigurement from permanent soft tissue distortion, which can be truly life-altering.
- 69% of infantile hemangiomas can leave permanent residual lesions (i.e., scars, extra skin or extra fatty tissue).

Diagnosis

A hemangioma is diagnosed based on appearance. Diagnostic tests aren't usually needed.

Causes

The causes of infantile hemangioma are not clear. However, we know certain babies are at higher risk of infantile hemangioma. Risk factors include:

- Babies with lower birth weight
- Females
- Caucasians
- Premature babies
- Multiple Gestation

It is important to know that you did nothing wrong and it is not your fault that your baby has infantile hemangioma.

Complications

Occasionally, a hemangioma can break down and develop a sore. This can lead to pain, bleeding, scarring or infection. Depending on where the hemangioma is situated, it may interfere with your child's vision, breathing, hearing or elimination, but this is rare.

Treatment

The majority of hemangiomas never need any form of treatment. Some parents feel that hemangioma treatment is necessary because the marks can be disfiguring and may cause social or psychological problems. Doctors may be hesitant to treat a hemangioma that isn't causing physical problems because hemangiomas usually fade gradually without treatment and because treatments have potential side effects.

If the growth interferes with your child's vision or causes other problems, treatment options may include:

1. Beta blocker drugs

- a. In small, superficial hemangiomas, a topical gel with the drug timolol may be applied to the affected skin.

b. For severe infantile hemangioma an oral solution of propranolol is considered the mainstay of medical treatments. Propranolol is also available as **Hemangeol** (made by Pierre-Fabre Pharmaceuticals). Hemangeol is the only FDA-approved version of propranolol for the treatment of infants with infantile hemangioma. Side effects can include high blood sugar, high blood pressure and wheezing.

2. Corticosteroid medications. For children who don't respond to beta blocker treatments or can't use them, corticosteroids may be an option. They can be injected into the nodule, given by mouth or applied to the skin. Side effects can include poor growth.

3. Laser surgery. Sometimes lasers can be used to remove a hemangioma or treat painful sores on a hemangioma.

Research to find other treatments with fewer side effects is ongoing. Some experimental treatments include interferon alfa and topical immune suppressants.

Outlook

Usually, a hemangioma is more of cosmetic concern than a medical one. If you're considering treatment for your child's hemangioma, weigh the pros and cons with your child's doctor. Your baby may need a pediatrician or specialist depending on the location and severity of their infantile hemangioma. These specialists include, pediatric dermatologists, head and neck surgeons, hematologists, otolaryngologists, as well as general and plastic surgeons.