

HEMANGIOMA

What is a hemangioma?

A hemangioma is a mark appearing at birth or often several weeks after birth. It most commonly appears as a rubbery, bright red nodule of extra blood vessels in the skin.

A hemangioma grows during the first year of life, and then recedes over time. A child who had a hemangioma during infancy usually has little visible trace of the growth by age 10.

A hemangioma can occur anywhere on the body, but most commonly appears on the face, scalp, chest or back. Treatment of a hemangioma usually isn't needed, unless the nodule interferes with vision, breathing, or essential body functions.

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 and becomes a spongy mass that protrudes from the skin. The hemangioma then enters a rest phase and, eventually, it begins to slowly disappear.

About half of all hemangiomas resolve by age 5, and nearly all hemangiomas are resolved by age 10. Although the color of the birthmark also fades, faint — but permanent — discoloration of the skin or residual extra skin may remain.

When to see a doctor

Your child's doctor will monitor the hemangioma during routine checkups. Contact your child's doctor if the hemangioma bleeds, forms a sore or looks infected.

Seek medical care if the condition interferes with your child's vision, breathing, hearing or elimination.

Causes

A hemangioma consists of an abnormally dense group of extra blood vessels. It's not clear what causes the blood vessels to group together, although there may be a hereditary component involved.

Risk factors

Hemangiomas occur more often in:

- Females
- Premature babies
- White infants

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.

Diagnosis

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

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 under the direction of a specialist may include:

- **Beta blocker drug.** In small, superficial hemangiomas, a gel with the drug timolol may be applied to the affected skin. A severe infantile hemangioma may disappear if treated with an oral solution of propranolol.
- **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.
- **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.

If you're considering treatment for your child's hemangioma, weigh the pros and cons with your child's doctor. Remember, most infantile hemangiomas disappear on their own during childhood.