

Hemangioma: Diagnosis & Treatments

A hemangioma is a type of non-cancerous tumor diagnosed in infancy. It's considered a kind of birthmark and is usually harmless. The tumor is bright red in appearance and can appear anywhere on the body. Here's everything you need to know about hemangiomas and how to treat them.

What is a hemangioma?

The tumor known as a hemangioma is actually a mass of abnormal blood vessels. This mass most commonly appears on the skin in the form of a large red bump, but can also be found under the skin. Most children with hemangiomas have only one. Since their characteristics are unique, hemangiomas can be easily diagnosed by a doctor.

Hemangiomas usually start off small and increase in size over a period of 4 months. Eventually, the hemangioma begins to shrink, and most completely disappear by age 5. Some may linger until age 10. However, even after a hemangioma has faded away, a small mark may be left on the skin.

White, female, and premature babies are most at risk for hemangiomas. It's estimated [that every 5 out of 100 babies](#) will be diagnosed with hemangioma.

Are hemangiomas dangerous?

Most of the time, hemangiomas are harmless. Medical care is rarely required, except in cases where the tumor is located in a sensitive area (near the eyes or nose) and interferes with sight or breathing. In addition, if the hemangioma starts to bleed or gets infected, treatment may be necessary. But the vast majority of hemangiomas pose no risk.

Different types of hemangiomas

Hemangiomas can be categorized into three different types.

Superficial hemangioma

This is the most common type of hemangioma, also known as a "strawberry" hemangioma due to its bright red color. It appears on the surface of the skin as a large bump.

Deep hemangioma

Deep hemangiomas are less common, and grow underneath the skin. They resemble a bruise, with a blue tint.

Combination / mixed hemangioma

This type of hemangioma is a combination of superficial and deep hemangioma.

Treating hemangioma

Although hemangiomas are mostly harmless, treatment may be required in some cases ([see: Are hemangiomas dangerous?](#)). Treating a hemangioma can be done through medications or through surgery.

- **Beta blockers.** Beta blocker drugs are mainly used in the form of a gel, applied to the skin. Sometimes, an oral beta blocker medication is used to treat severe hemangioma.
- **Corticosteroid medication.** If beta blocker treatment proves ineffective, corticosteroids are next in line. These drugs are injected directly into the hemangioma.
- **Surgery.** If all else fails, laser surgery can remove small external hemangiomas. However, larger hemangiomas are unable to be removed via laser treatment.

All methods of hemangioma treatment carry the risk of side effects--beta blockers and corticosteroids in particular. Side effects may include low blood sugar, fatigue, low blood pressure (beta blockers) and high blood sugar, increased risk of infections, irritability (corticosteroids).

Sources

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