What is a Haemangioma?

Haemangiomas (strawberry birthmarks) are an abnormal growth of blood vessels just below the skin. They are very common, occurring in one in ten babies.

Haemangiomas appear small and flat shortly after birth but may become larger or problematic later on. Common sites are the head or neck but they can occur anywhere on the body, including the internal organs.

Haemangiomas grow fastest in the first six months of life (proliferate phase), after which time growth slows down but occasionally growth can continue after the first year of life. Fifty per cent of haemangiomas will have resolved by the time a child reaches five years of age and virtually all are gone before puberty.

How and when are haemangioma treated?

Small haemangiomas may not need any treatment as they will shrink spontaneously over time. Treatment is considered:

- the haemangioma is encroaching on the eye
- if there is interference with breathing, feeding or bowel movements
- if there is potential for significant disfigurement.

If treatment is required, Propranolol is currently the drug of choice.

What is Propranolol?

It is a drug called a beta blocker, which has been used for many years for children with other medical problems. Its success in treating haemangiomas was first reported in 2008.

How does Propranolol help with Haemangiomas?

Propranolol can make blood vessels tighten. This is particularly helpful in haemangiomas as it reduces the blood flow, lightens the colour and makes haemangiomas softer. It also slows the growth and speeds up shrinkage in the majority of cases.

Are there side effects with Propranolol treatment?

Side effects include a slow heart rate and low blood pressure which will be monitored by the medical team. Other side effects include:

- Cool extremities (hands and feet)
- Sleep Disturbance (restlessness, night terrors)
- Wheezing
- Low blood sugar which is more common in premature babies or if a baby is not feeding properly

What should you look out for?

If you notice persistently cold feet or if your baby is unwell, clammy, pale, weak or listless, this may be a sign of low blood pressure or low blood sugar.

What should you do?

Phone the hospital (01-4096100) and speak to a member of the Dermatology Team. If your concern is urgent, take the baby to your GP or the nearest hospital or ring 999.

How can you avoid some of these side effects?

Ensure you keep all appointments as it is important to monitor blood pressure during treatment. If you need to cancel appointments please contact the dermatology nurse or doctor to discuss.

Propranolol as prescribed by consultant is usually taken twice a day or may be prescribed 3 times daily. Give the Propranolol immediately before feeds as much as possible and avoid long periods during the day and night without feeds.

Infants less than 6wks feed every 4hrs, between 6wks and 4mts every 5hrs, over 4mts of age feed every 6-8hrs.

Most babies benefit from wearing extra socks under their babygro to keep feet warm.

What does starting Propranolol involve?

Your baby will be admitted for one day to the day ward. Please arrive at appointed time. Premature babies or babies with underlying medical conditions may have a longer period in hospital depending on the area involved and may need review by other specialties.

Your baby will have a clinical photograph before commencing propranolol and will be weighed.

Blood pressure and heart rate are monitored pre first dose and are checked hourly for 4 hrs.

Blood sugar is checked pre dose and after 4 hrs.

If your baby is well and observations are normal he/she will be discharged home early afternoon.

Follow up

Patients return to the Dermatology Nurse clinic for monitoring one week after discharge.

Please bring bottle of Medication with you to all appointments to confirm dose concentration. Shared care may be arranged with your local hospital if possible.

Week 5. Patients are reviewed by Consultant. If a dose is increased, please bring the new prescription and your bottle of Propranolol to your community pharmacy to re-label the correct dose.

Periodic photos will be taken to assess improvement while on treatment.

On going monitoring takes place on a monthly basis.

Patients are usually on Propranolol for six months but this can be longer depending on the response to treatment.
How is Propranolol administered?

Propranolol is in liquid form and is usually taken by mouth twice daily. The dosage may be adjusted by your doctor according to the response.

There are many strengths of Propranolol available in Ireland, however oral liquid 50mgs/5ml (Syprol SF) is the recommended preparation from Our Lady’s Hospital. It is advised that you do not switch between preparations. This concentration has been chosen so that your child does not need to take a large volume of liquid per dose.

Not every community pharmacy will stock this medicine. However, prior to discharge from Our Lady’s Hospital, the ward pharmacist will contact your local community pharmacy to ensure that the medicine is available. If it is not, the hospital pharmacy will supply enough until it can be obtained locally. Please ensure that these arrangements have been made before you leave the hospital to prevent your child missing doses.

If your child is sick, vomiting or refusing to eat or drink, Stop Propranolol and inform your doctor. Once your child is well and tolerating normal feeds, Propranolol can be recommenced at the same dose.

If your child spits up a dose or misses a dose, do not give another dose.
Do not double the dose next time, wait until next scheduled dose.

Remember
Ask your nurse if you are unsure about anything about your child’s care

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Treatment of Haemangiomas with Propranolol
Information for Parents

Dermatology Department
Tel: (01) 4096100 (main switch) and ask for bleep 497 or speak to the Dermatology secretary

Pharmacy Department
For queries about medicine, please contact the Pharmacy Department (Tel:014096070/4096536) Mon- Fri 8.30 -5pm