

Propranolol for the Treatment of Infantile Haemangioma

Information for Parents

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What is a haemangioma?

Infantile haemangiomas are a collection of small blood vessels. They are also called 'strawberry naevus' or 'strawberry mark'. They usually appear in the first few days or weeks of life as one or several raised red areas on the surface of the skin, or as bluish swellings arising deeper in the skin. They occur in up to 10 % of babies and are more common in females, premature infants and multiple birth (twins).

What is propranolol?

Propranolol is a type of drug called a beta-blocker. It is a liquid medication that is swallowed. It helps to stop haemangiomas from growing and helps to shrink them more quickly. This medicine is used because it has fewer side effects than other treatments. It is a commonly used medication and is also given to children for other medical problems.

Why does my child need treatment?

Infantile haemangiomas often get better without treatment. However, sometimes haemangiomas can cause problems that need treatment, for example if they are close to your child's eye. They can also become infected and painful. If this happens, propranolol could help improve your child's symptoms.


How long will my child need to take propranolol?

Your child needs to be treated with propranolol throughout the growing phase of the haemangioma. This is normally until they are one to two years old. Your child will have outpatient clinic follow up to assess how the treatment is working.

What are the side effects?

Most children take this medicine without getting any side effects. However sometimes it causes side effects such as:

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- Disturbed sleep
 - Tummy ache and/or nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
 - Blue fingertips
 - Wheeze and cough
 - A slow heart rate
 - A rash

Rarely, propranolol can cause your child to have low blood sugar levels. Look for the following signs:

- Increased sweating
- Shakiness
- A big increase or drop in hunger levels.

Seek medical attention immediately from your GP or local Emergency Department if your child has any of the above symptoms of a low blood sugar level.

To help avoid low blood sugar levels, give the propranolol with a feed or meal. Avoid long periods without a feed or meal (no more than 5 hours in babies under 3 months old and no more than 8 hours in children over 3 months old).

What if my child has another illness while taking propranolol?

Propranolol may need to be stopped temporarily if your child has an illness that causes wheezing, if they are being sick (vomiting) or are not eating and drinking well. If your child has these symptoms whilst unwell, your doctor can decide if the propranolol should be stopped temporarily.

Can my child take other medicines at the same time?

Always ask your doctor before giving your child other medicines while they are taking propranolol. Teething gels containing lidocaine should be avoided while taking propranolol.

What do I need to do next?

Your child will be seen in PAU (paediatric assessment unit) to have their first dose of propranolol. They will be monitored for a couple of hours to make sure they do not have any side effects to propranolol. If they have any side effects we can quickly treat them. If they do not have any side effects, they will have a prescription for propranolol sent to the hospital pharmacy in the main entrance for you to collect before you leave. Your child will be reviewed in outpatient clinic in a few months to check how the treatment is going.

You will need to collect further bottles of propranolol from your local pharmacy. Please contact your GP to prescribe the propranolol.

When you pick up the prescription it is important to check with the pharmacist that they have given you the right strength as propranolol comes in two different strengths. If you are unsure about the strength, check with your GP.

Questions or concerns?

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to your child's consultant, contact their GP or phone PAU on 01225 824590.

If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

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