

Strawberry Hemangiomas

Strawberry hemangiomas are common masses of cells that usually make up tiny blood vessels. Strawberry hemangiomas, while they are technically birthmarks, are often not noticed at birth. In fact, they usually do not become obvious until the first few weeks of life. These occur more often in females than males and are more commonly seen in Caucasian infants than in other racial groups. The vast majority of these occur as one solitary mark. However, in about 20 percent of these infants, more than one may be present.

Probably the most concerning problem for parents associated with these mostly benign birth marks is that they undergo rapid growth over the first six to ten months of life. Thus, what began as a mild blemish can become a quite noticeable mark on the body, usually the face. After this rapid growth phase, it's size only increases in proportion to the child's normal growth. Then over the next several years, the red color of the hemangioma begins to fade the mark dissolves away. Most of the time, there is little if any mark left behind. However, some may have pale scar where the hemangioma used to be. Strawberry hemangiomas completely resolve in 50 percent of children by age five and 70 percent by age seven. The rest show gradual fading completed by the time they reach the teenage years.

The vast majority of children with strawberry hemangiomas experience no complications. However, there are a few who do encounter some problems. In less than five percent of children, the hemangioma can leave a divot in the skin during its fading away phase. These usually occur when the lips are involved. In addition, uncommonly, the hemangioma can enlarge to involve structures vital to eyesight or breathing. Hemangiomas that involve the eyelids can hamper eyesight by their growth, which in turn causes the eyelid to droop. While this condition is transient, because the hemangioma will fade away, having the eyesight blocked by the eyelid can cause significant problems with the development of correct vision. In addition, these birthmarks can rarely involve the inside of the mouth and throat, which could cause difficulty breathing.

Because strawberry hemangiomas rarely cause significant medical or cosmetic problems, treatment is usually reserved for those who are at high risk for complications. In these cases, high doses of steroid medication given orally are usually first tried. In addition, there is now a good amount of experience using certain laser therapy techniques. However, the use of this technology has not yet become widespread.