

Department of Dermatology

Propranolol treatment for infantile haemangioma

Information for parents



What is a haemangioma?

An infantile haemangioma is a collection of small blood vessels. They are also known as a strawberry naevus or 'strawberry mark'. The blood vessels can be a combination of different shades of red. They appear shortly after birth and grow over the first few months of life. They then shrink over time.

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 can speed up the normal shrinking process. It is a commonly used drug and is often also given to children for other medical problems.

Why does my child need treatment?

Haemangiomas often get better without treatment. However, occasionally a haemangioma will cause problems that need treatment. For example, if it is near your child's eye, it could affect their vision. Haemangiomas can also become infected and painful. If this happens, treatment with propranolol can improve your child's symptoms.

Is it safe?

Lots of people around the country are now using this treatment, as it is thought to have fewer side effects than other existing treatments. Although this is a relatively new treatment for haemangiomas, propranolol has been used safely and effectively for years in much higher doses by paediatricians, for children with cardiac (heart) problems.

The reason we ask for your child to come into hospital when they have the first lower dose and then a week later for the first higher dose so that if any side-effects do develop we can treat them straight away.

How long will my child need to take propranolol?

Your child will need to be treated with propranolol throughout the 'growing phase' of the haemangioma. This is normally until your child is between one and two years of age. If propranolol is stopped too early then the haemangioma can occasionally start to grow again. If this does happen, we can restart the propranolol treatment.

At each clinic follow-up appointment we will assess how the treatment is working.

What are the side effects?

Most children can take this medicine without experiencing any side effects, however occasionally it can cause some side effects such as:

- disturbed sleep
- tummy ache
- blue fingertips
- wheeze and cough
- a slow heart rate.

Rarely, propranolol can cause children to develop 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 either your GP or local Emergency Department if your child is showing any of the symptoms above.

What should I do to avoid low blood sugar levels?

Give the propranolol with a feed or meal to help avoid your child's blood sugar becoming low. Avoid long periods without giving a feed or something to eat. If your child is less than three months old, try to make sure that they feed at least once every five hours. If your child is over three months old, make sure they feed or have something to eat at least once every eight hours.

What if my child has another illness while taking propranolol?

Propranolol may need to be stopped temporarily if your child develops an illnesses that could cause wheeziness; if they are not eating and drinking well; or if they are being sick (vomiting).

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. Some asthma treatments (such as salbutamol) should not be taken at the same time because they will not work. If your child has asthma and needs treatment then a different medicine will be used.

What do I need to do next?

We will arrange for you to bring your child in to the Paediatric Day Unit for their first dose. This will just be half of the normal dose. We will then monitor your child for two hours after they have taken the half dose. If they don't have any side effects, you will be able to give your child the half dose of propranolol at home, three times a day with food, for one week.

After one week, you will need to bring your child back to the Paediatric Day Unit again, where we will give them the full dose and monitor them once more. If they don't have any side effects, you can continue to give your child the full dose of propranolol at home. We will see them every few months to check how the treatment is going.

Picking up the prescription

When you collect your child's prescription it is important to check the label with the pharmacist.

Propranolol liquid comes in two strengths. It is important to use the same strength for each prescription. The two strengths are 5mg per 5ml and 50mg per 5ml. If you are not sure about the strength your child should be taking please talk to their GP.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns please contact your child's consultant on the telephone number below or speak to their GP.

Paediatric dermatologist's secretary

Tel: **01865 228 224**

(Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm)

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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