PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

# Propranolol for infantile hemangiomas (IH)

**Propranolol (pro-Pran-oh-lol) is an FDA-approved treatment for infantile hemangioma.**

**An infantile hemangioma is a birthmark that can be seen on the skin at birth or appear in the first weeks or months of a baby's life.**

A hemangioma is made up of small blood vessels—all located in one area of skin. It can be flat or bumpy. Infantile hemangioma (IH) is not cancer or dangerous but can grow very fast in the first weeks to months after it is noted. Some IH are treated with a medicine called propranolol.

## WHAT IS PROPRANOLOL?

Propranolol is a medicine that can fade and shrink most IH in a few months. Propranolol can be safe in infants and young children. For almost 20 years, propranolol has been used to treat IH that are causing problems or may cause problems in the baby. For example, propranolol may be used in very big hemangiomas, hemangiomas with skin breakdown (called "ulcerated"), or hemangiomas that affect the baby's eyesight or hearing. Propranolol may also be used if the way the IH looks might affect the child's self-esteem or lead to teasing later on.

## HOW IS PROPRANOLOL TREATMENT STARTED?

Propranolol is a flavored liquid medicine prescribed by your doctor. Your doctor will check your baby's weight and sometimes heart rate and tell you the right amount to give your baby. The first propranolol dose may be at home or in a doctor's office or hospital, depending on the baby's age and health.

At home, propranolol can be started with a smaller "test" dose. The doctor will tell you how to slowly increase the amount you give to the "target" dose over 1-2 weeks. As your baby grows, your doctor will usually recommend more propranolol to stay at the target dose based on your child's weight.

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS FOR PROPRANOLOL?

### OCCASIONAL MILD SIDE EFFECTS

These side effects are often short-lived:

- **Cool hands and feet**
- **Changes in sleep:** Falling or staying asleep, nightmares
- **Stomach issues:** Diarrhea, constipation, spitting up, vomiting
- **Lower heart rate or blood pressure:** Usually these changes are very small and cause no health problems.
- **Coughing, wheezing:** Stop the medicine and let your doctor know that your baby has these.

Let your doctor know if your baby is showing any of these signs. Some doctors might switch to a similar medicine such as atenolol or nadolol for babies who are having or may have side effects with propranolol. These other medicines seem to work as well for hemangiomas as propranolol, but they are pills. They need to be made into a liquid by a special pharmacy before giving to babies and children.

### RARE, SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS

**Call 911 or emergency care right away if your baby has these symptoms:**

- **Allergic reaction:** Trouble breathing, severe wheezing, swelling of lips, tongue, itching, hives
- **Low blood sugar:** Drowsy, will not wake up, sweaty, shaking, seizures

## HOW DO I GIVE THE PROPRANOLOL TO MY BABY?

- ☐ Propranolol is given to the baby by mouth, *always* with a feeding.
- ☐ It is usually given twice a day at least 6 hours apart (6-10 hours).
- ☐ Shake the bottle well and draw up the exact amount with a pediatric syringe. Do not use a spoon.
- ☐ Put the syringe in the baby's mouth at the side of a cheek and gently squirt the medicine in.
- ☐ If the baby spits up the medication, do not give another dose at that time.
- ☐ If you forgot to give the medicine, do not give it until the next planned time.
- ☐ Do not give propranolol if your baby is sick, vomiting, or is not feeding normally.

## HOW LONG IS MY BABY GOING TO BE ON PROPRANOLOL?

Propranolol is given for at least 6 months and, most of the time, until the baby is at least 1 year old. For some babies, the medicine needs to be given longer.

### OTHER INFORMATION:

- » It is fine to continue propranolol if your baby is getting a vaccine.
- » It's best if only 1 or 2 people give the baby this medication to prevent any mistakes in giving it.
- » If there are several caregivers, tell them about propranolol and the side effects to look out for.
- » Keep propranolol in a fridge or cool place with safety lid on, tucked away from children and pets.
- » See videos and more details for caregivers about propranolol at **www.hemangiomaeducation.org**.

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