

HEALTH

Lasers used to treat birthmarks

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Treatment for unsightly port-wine stains and strawberry marks has been greatly improved with the use of lasers.

"Most patients get a 50 to 75 percent lightening of the birthmark," said Dr. Moise Levy, a dermatologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and co-director of the Texas Children's Hospital Birthmark Center.

Port-wine stains, most often found on the head and neck, are flat purple-red birthmarks that do not disappear with age.

Strawberry marks, or hemangiomas, are bright red, protrude from the skin and often go away without treatment.

Both types are formed by masses of small blood vessels in abnormal locations.

"Although strawberry marks often disappear as an infant grows, many leave loose skin, mild scarring or fine blood

vessels in their place," Levy said.

Port-wine stains require five to seven laser treatments at two-to-three-month intervals. Strawberry marks can be treated more frequently, and fine broken vessels on the face as often as once a month.

"Because treatment often takes a year or more, parents like to begin treatment well before a child enters school," he said.

Levy and colleague Dr. Jim Nigro have treated infants as early as one month after birth, but adolescents and adults also experience good results.

The laser, which uses a yellow light absorbed only by red, reacts with a blood cell protein in the birthmark's vessel mass.

The blood vessels absorb the laser's energy and convert it into heat that damages the vessels.

"The body's defense system removes the damaged cells, and when the area

heals, the treated vessels are gone or lightened."

The laser feels like a pinprick or small rubber band snap to the skin. "Depending on the size of the area, that can be hard to tolerate and painful without some type of anesthesia," he said.

Levy cautions that treatments cause bruising for seven to ten days and swelling to treated areas that have loose skin such as the mouth and around the eyes.

Intervals between treatments allow for healing.

Cost for treatment varies, Levy says, depending on the size of the birthmark and number of treatments needed.

"The degree of final lightening depends on the location. Some parts of the face clear better than others, and the extremities, especially the legs, are harder to clear," he said.

Inflammatory bowel disease may hide other problems

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Inflammatory bowel disease may be disguised as many other problems in children, researchers say.

"Growth failure is the most common problem associated with inflammatory bowel disease in children," said Dr. Kathleen Motil, at the USDA/ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "Malnutrition is a major factor that contributes to growth retardation in children."

Inflammatory bowel disease is a chronic illness of the gastrointestinal tract. There are two types; Crohn's disease, which affects the whole gastrointestinal tract and has no known cure, and ulcerative colitis, which affects the large bowel and can only be cured by removing the colon.

Victims of inflammatory bowel disease suffer from frequent bouts with diarrhea, abdominal pain, and rectal bleeding. The disease may also disguise itself as rheumatoid arthritis, liver disease, gall bladder disease or eye disease.

Many sufferers may refuse to eat because of a loss of appetite, nausea, or diarrhea associated with food ingestion. Others may lose nutrients because of chronic diarrhea, still others may have

intestinal malabsorption.

"Nutritional therapy is a good way to improve growth in children with inflammatory bowel disease," said Motil, a Baylor assistant professor of pediatrics. "Our studies have shown feeding children a formula high in energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals through a button gastrostomy, a device placed directly into the stomach, reduced the inflammatory process and made them feel better."

Steroids also can promote growth in children with inflammatory bowel disease, but many children do not like to take this medication because it causes them to gain a disproportionate amount of fat.

Motil believes it is important for parents to find out as soon as possible if a child is suffering from inflammatory bowel disease.

"Symptoms are more severe and the mortality rate is highest in younger children," said Motil. "It is imperative that parents make sure pediatricians have not overlooked inflammatory bowel disease when treating children for chronic diarrhea, constant stomach aches, arthritis, or other ailments."

CHILDWATCH

Parents shape the future, teach values for children

*By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

On June 1, when tens of thousands of parents took a Stand For Healthy Children in more than 575 communities in every state and the District of Columbia, the nation was reminded once again that no group arouses our passions and hopes more than our children. But while Stand For Children rallies of the past two years have put the spotlight on parents' loving concern for children, the truth is, parents stand for children every day when there are no television cameras around.

Parents have the most challenging — and most rewarding — work in the world. Parenting means being responsible for a valuable human life. It means shaping the way a child's body, mind, and spirit grow. It means shaping the future.

Parents who are patient, loving, kind, and fair are everyday heroes. We are our child's first teacher, role model, inspiration, and moral guide. It is hard work, and there is no greater responsibility. But the rewards — healthy, caring, responsible, and productive

children who love life — are indescribably fulfilling. Here are a few helpful parenting tips to consider:

- Realize that becoming a parent is the most challenging mission in life. Be prepared to support your child physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially for a lifetime.

- Spend time with your child — quality as well as quantity. Sharing your time nourishes his heart and soul just as much as food nourishes his body.

- Pay attention to and listen to your child. She will feel valuable and will also pay attention to and listen to you.

- Be consistent. Your child needs to eat and sleep at regular times each day, follow reasonable rules that stay the same from day to day, and enjoy a steady relationship with you that doesn't bounce between big highs and big lows.

- Set appropriate limits — with love. Setting limits constructively, firmly, and lovingly makes a child's world a safe place. Children who misbehave typically do so because they want and need you to set limits. If you're not sure whether he is ready to try something new, ask other

parents about their experiences or check with your child's doctor or teacher.

Teach your child right from wrong. Children learn values and morals primarily from parents. Not only by what you say, but more important, by what you do, be a good role model. Teach him to be honest, fair, responsible, and giving. He will model himself after you, in good ways and bad. Teach him the best lessons you can!

- Praise and encourage your child when she does well.

Criticize her action — not her — when she needs correction.

Parents are the most important people in children's lives and deserve recognition for the outstanding job they do each day. Remember, the lessons we teach our children at this crucial stage in their lives will be the lessons they teach their children.

The more they see us stand up for what is right, the more we can be certain that our legacy — to them and to the nation — will be a proud and lasting one.



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Unusual headaches might signal tumor

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Brain tumors produce some distinctive symptoms that are worth watching for, so that early, lifesaving treatments can be started, says a neuro-oncologist at Stanford University Medical Center.

"Brain tumors can produce headaches and bouts of nausea that are somewhat different from those caused by other, often less serious, conditions," says Dr. Irene Pech, a postdoctoral fellow in Stanford's neuro-oncology program.

"The vast majority of headaches are simple and not caused by brain tumors, so certainly a tumor is not the first thing you should think of when your head hurts," Pech says. Nevertheless, some warning signs might be cause for mentioning your headaches to your doctor.

"Headaches that wake you up in the middle of the night, that feel particularly painful first thing in the morning or that seem to get worse rather than better when you lie down, may signal a possible tumor," says Pech.

Persistent nausea and vomiting unaccompanied by fever or diarrhea may signal pressure on the brain, possibly indicating a tumor, Pech says.

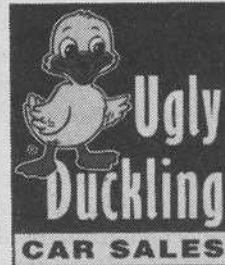
Also, signs of a stroke — such as numbness, extreme weakness in the limbs or difficulty with walking or balance — could stem from a brain tumor under specific circumstances. "Strokes typically occur suddenly, whereas similar symptoms caused by a tumor tend to worsen over a period of several months or more," Pech said.

According to the American Cancer Society, about 17,500 malignant brain tumors are diagnosed in Americans each year, "and increasingly more of these are treatable if diagnosed in time," said Pech.

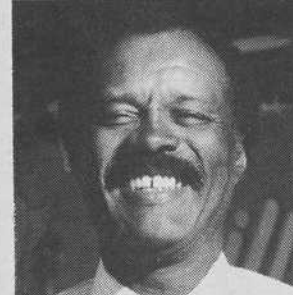
Surgery, radiation and chemotherapy are methods that specialists can use to attack the tumor.

Tumors range on a scale from highly malignant to benign, Pech said, and the treatment approach depends on how aggressive the individual tumor is. A highly malignant tumor may require a variety of treatment methods, while a clearly benign tumor might require removal and monitoring but no further treatment, she said.

"If you are experiencing a possible warning sign of a brain tumor, have your family physician check it out," Pech said. "If what he or she finds is suggestive of a tumor, a diagnostic brain scan, such as an MRI, and a referral visit to a neurologist are probably appropriate."



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