

MASTOCYTOSIS

What is mastocytosis?

Mast cells are normally found around our blood vessels. Having too much mast cells in the skin is known as mastocytosis. The mast cells contain chemicals including histamine, that can be released when the lesion is rubbed, in heat, or with certain medications. In children, this disorder may appear as a single lesion - "solitary mastocytoma" or more generalized forms called maculopapular mastocytosis (aka "urticaria pigmentosa") or "mastocytosis."

The spots usually appear at birth or early childhood and kids can get more over the first few years before eventually going away in most cases. Mastocytomas usually clear by school age. The yellow-brown spots of urticaria pigmentosa may begin to clear at puberty.

Patients often develop local redness and itchy hive-like areas over the lesions after gentle rubbing or stroking (Darier's sign) due to the release of histamine from the mast cells. Sometimes a small fluid-filled blister will appear always at the same site. When itching is a problem, an antihistamine (an agent that blocks histamine) such as Claritin kids, Alerius kids or Reactine kids, may be given. If problems such as flushing, dizziness, irritability, diarrhea or extensive swelling happen frequently, a long term use of antihistamine can be used.



What things can cause these spots to swell up?

Physical stimuli: Exercise; skin friction; hot baths; cold exposure (especially swimming); drinking hot beverages, ethanol or eating spicy foods.

Drugs: Aspirin, alcohol, morphine, codeine, polymyxin B, thiamine, quinine, D-tubocurarine, radiographic dyes scopolamine, procaine, opiates, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (ie Advil), gallamine, decamethonium.

Others: IV high molecular weight polymers (dextran), emotional stress, bacterial toxins, snake, venoms, polypeptides released by ascaris, jellyfish, crayfish and lobsters.

A helpful website for more information is <http://www.mastokids.org/>