CONDITION

Stork bite

A stork bite is a harmless, flat pink birthmark caused by visible small blood vessels.

WHAT IT IS
Flat pink birthmark from small surface blood vessels

BODY SYSTEM
Skin and small blood vessels

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Flat pink patch, blanching, irregular edges, darker with crying

WHAT CAUSES IT
Widened small blood vessels present from birth

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED
Skin examination; tests usually unnecessary

MAIN TREATMENT
Reassurance; laser treatment for persistent visible patches

CAN IT BE CURED?
Sometimes - many fade; laser may lighten persistent patches

IS IT AN EMERGENCY?
No - the birthmark itself is harmless

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK
Harmless; facial patches fade more often than neck patches

Overview

A stork bite is a common type of birthmark made up of small blood vessels close to the skin's surface. Its medical name is naevus simplex . It usually looks like a flat, pale pink or red patch with uneven edges.

The term "stork bite" often refers to a patch on the back of the neck. Similar patches can appear between the eyebrows, on the forehead, on the eyelids, around the nose or upper lip, or on the scalp. They may be called salmon patches in these locations, but they are the same type of birthmark.

A stork bite is present at birth, although it may become easier to see during the first days of life. The colour often deepens when a baby cries, feeds, strains, becomes warm, or is upset. This temporary change happens because more blood flows through the small vessels.

These birthmarks are benign, meaning they are not cancerous or harmful. They do not usually cause pain, affect development, or need treatment. Facial patches often fade during early childhood. A patch on the back of the neck is more likely to remain, although hair may eventually cover it.

Symptoms

A stork bite is an appearance rather than an illness. It does not usually cause physical symptoms.

Typical features include:

Fading under pressure is called blanching . It happens because pressure briefly pushes blood out of the small surface vessels.

The skin should otherwise feel normal. A stork bite is not usually raised, scaly, warm, painful, itchy, or swollen. It does not develop a lump beneath the skin.

Patches are often centred on the body's midline, such as the middle of the forehead or the back of the neck. They may also appear on both eyelids in a roughly symmetrical pattern.

A mark that becomes thick, develops sores, grows rapidly, or does not blanch may be another type of skin condition or birthmark. These changes do not necessarily mean something serious, but they are worth having examined.

- A flat pink, red, or salmon-coloured patch
- Irregular or poorly defined edges
- Colour that becomes stronger with crying, heat, or straining
- Temporary fading when gentle pressure is applied

Causes and risk factors

A stork bite forms when small blood vessels called capillaries remain widened near the skin's surface. Blood inside these vessels gives the patch its pink or red colour.

The exact reason this happens is not fully understood. It may relate to the way the nerves that control blood vessel narrowing mature before and after birth. As that control develops, many patches become less visible.

A stork bite is not caused by anything a parent did during pregnancy. It is not linked to food, exercise, stress, medicines used as directed, or the way a baby was delivered. It is also not an

injury from birth.

Most stork bites occur on their own rather than being passed down through families. Having one does not usually mean that a child has a blood vessel disorder elsewhere in the body.

Some marks are easier to see on lighter skin. On darker skin, they may look red-brown, purple, or slightly darker than the surrounding area. Visibility does not indicate how important or harmful the mark is.

Diagnosis

A healthcare professional can usually identify a stork bite by examining its colour, shape, location, and response to gentle pressure. No blood test, scan, or skin biopsy is normally needed for a typical patch.

The examination helps distinguish it from other marks. For example, a port-wine birthmark is another flat blood vessel birthmark, but it is often more sharply outlined, may affect one side of the face, and generally does not fade without treatment. It may become darker or thicker with age.

An infantile haemangioma is a different type of blood vessel growth. It may be absent or faint at birth, then grow during the first weeks or months. It can become bright red and raised or form a deeper bluish swelling.

Bruises can also resemble birthmarks, but they usually change colour over days and do not consistently blanch. Skin irritation or infection may be warm, tender, swollen, or associated with other symptoms.

Photographs taken in similar lighting can help document a mark over time. If its appearance is unusual, widespread, or difficult to classify, a referral to a dermatologist may be suggested. A dermatologist is a doctor who specialises in skin conditions.

Treatment and management

Most stork bites need no treatment. They do not require creams, medicines, dressings, massage, or changes to feeding. Routine bathing and gentle skin care are suitable.

Facial patches commonly become lighter as a child grows. Because this natural fading can take time, observation is usually the main approach. A neck patch may remain into adult life but is often hidden by hair.

If a persistent mark is clearly visible and causes distress, a dermatologist may discuss vascular

laser treatment. The treatment most often considered is a pulsed dye laser , which sends light into the blood vessels while limiting damage to nearby skin.

Laser treatment may lighten a patch, but it does not guarantee complete removal. More than one session may be needed. Temporary discomfort, redness, swelling, bruising, and changes in skin colour can occur. Scarring is uncommon but possible. The likely benefit and risks depend on the mark's location, skin tone, and previous response to treatment.

Cosmetic camouflage products may be an option for an older child or adult who wants to reduce the mark's visibility. This is a personal choice, not a medical need.

Sun protection will not remove a stork bite. However, protecting exposed skin from excessive sunlight can reduce tanning around the mark and support general skin health.

Complications

A typical isolated stork bite does not damage the skin or affect the brain, eyes, spine, or other organs. It does not become skin cancer.

The main possible impact is emotional rather than physical. A visible mark may attract comments or questions, particularly if it remains on the face. Supportive, matter-of-fact explanations can help a child understand that the mark is a harmless difference in skin colour.

Persistent or unusually extensive marks are sometimes assessed to make sure they have not been mistaken for another type of blood vessel birthmark. This is about confirming the diagnosis rather than expecting a complication from a stork bite itself.

Prevention

A stork bite cannot be prevented. It develops before birth, and no action during pregnancy is known to cause or prevent it.

There is also no proven home treatment that makes it fade faster. Scrubbing, bleaching products, acids, and unprescribed skin-lightening creams can irritate or injure a baby's skin and should not be used on the mark.

Living with it and what to expect

A stork bite usually changes slowly. Patches on the eyelids, forehead, or between the eyebrows often become much less noticeable during the first few years of life. The exact

timing cannot be predicted for an individual child.

Patches on the back of the neck are more likely to remain into later childhood or adulthood. They generally stay flat and harmless. Their colour may still deepen temporarily during exercise, heat, illness, or strong emotion.

A stork bite does not limit feeding, sleep, play, school, sports, or future work. No special monitoring is usually needed after the diagnosis is clear.

As a child gets older, families can use simple language such as "It is a birthmark made from tiny blood vessels." Avoiding shame or secrecy may help the child respond confidently to questions. Whether to use camouflage or consider laser treatment later is an individual choice.

When to get medical help

A stork bite itself is not an emergency. It can usually be discussed during a routine newborn examination or regular health visit.

Arrange a routine medical review if:

Seek prompt medical advice if the area becomes painful, hot, swollen, or begins leaking fluid, especially if there is fever. These are not typical features of a stork bite and may indicate an unrelated skin problem.

Seek urgent help if bleeding does not stop after firm, continuous pressure. Call emergency services if a baby develops breathing difficulty, becomes unusually unresponsive, or has blue or grey colouring of the lips, tongue, or skin. These symptoms are not caused by a stork bite, even if the birthmark also looks darker at the time.

- You are unsure whether the mark is a stork bite
- It becomes raised, lumpy, darker, or sharply outlined
- It grows rather than fading as the child grows
- It remains prominent and is causing distress
- A facial mark affects one side or extends around an eye
- The skin becomes repeatedly irritated or starts to break down

Common questions

Will a stork bite go away?

Many facial patches fade during infancy or early childhood, although some remain faintly

visible. A mark on the back of the neck is more likely to persist. It should stay flat and harmless even if it does not disappear.

Does a stork bite get darker when a baby cries?

Yes. Crying, feeding, straining, heat, or excitement can temporarily increase blood flow through the small vessels. The mark should return to its usual colour after the baby settles or cools down.

Is a stork bite caused by the birth itself?

No. The mark develops before birth. It is not caused by pressure during labour, forceps, a caesarean birth, or an injury to the baby.

Is a stork bite the same as a port-wine birthmark?

No. Both involve small blood vessels, but they usually behave differently. A stork bite has softer, less defined edges and often fades. A port-wine birthmark is usually more clearly outlined and tends to remain. A medical examination can distinguish them.

Can creams remove a stork bite?

No cream has been shown to remove one. Many patches fade naturally. For a persistent visible mark, a dermatologist may discuss laser treatment, but this is usually optional.

Can a stork bite come back after fading?

A faded patch may become temporarily visible during crying, exercise, fever, heat, or strong emotion. This does not necessarily mean it has returned or is worsening. Some faint colour may remain in the skin long term.

Sources

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