



Hemangioma of the Liver

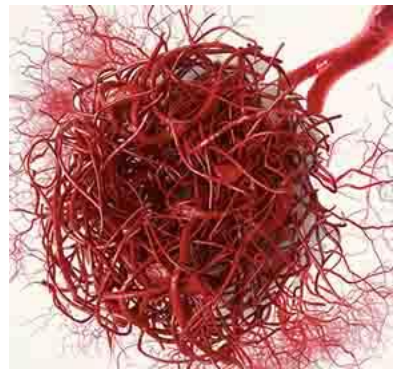
What is a Hemangioma?

A hemangioma (he-man-jee-O-muh) is an abnormal cluster of blood vessels forming a benign (non-cancerous) mass. Occasionally, these masses can be seen externally on the skin as a birth defect. Sometimes referred to as a “port wine stain,” external hemangiomas are common. Most are small but can be disfiguring.



What is a Liver Hemangioma?

A liver hemangioma, also known as a hepatic hemangioma and cavernous hemangioma, is also a benign tumor made up of a tangle of blood vessels. It is the most common type of benign liver tumor and is usually found incidentally



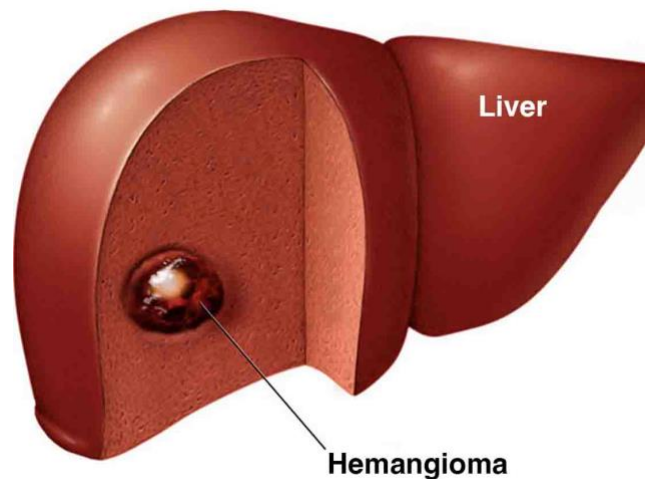
during imaging tests for other conditions. These liver masses are estimated to occur in up to 5% of the population. Although generally harmless and asymptomatic, understanding liver hemangiomas is crucial for proper management and alleviating patient concerns.

These masses can vary in size from just a few millimeters to many centimeters. The exact cause of liver hemangiomas is unknown, but they are believed to be congenital, meaning individuals are born with them. They are most commonly found in adults aged 30-50 and more prevalent in women than men. Most hemangiomas are solitary, but in some cases, multiple hemangiomas can be present in the liver. These tumors are typically small and do not grow significantly over time. However, in rare instances, they can enlarge, leading to symptoms and complications.

Despite being benign, the presence of a liver hemangioma can cause anxiety for patients, underscoring the importance of awareness and education about the condition.

Symptoms of Liver Hemangioma

Hemangioma tumors can occur in various organs, including the brain, where they can



sometimes cause problems. In the liver, though, they rarely do. Most people with liver hemangiomas do not experience symptoms and may never know they have one. However, if the hemangioma is large (over 10 cm), it can cause symptoms such as abdominal pain, which is the most common symptom and is usually felt in the right upper abdomen. This pain can be intermittent or constant and may vary in intensity. Nausea and vomiting can also occur due to the pressure the hemangioma places on the stomach and surrounding organs. In rare cases, a large hemangioma can cause the liver to enlarge, a condition known as hepatomegaly. This enlargement can be detected during a physical examination or through imaging tests. While these symptoms can be alarming, it is important to remember that they are not indicative of cancer.

Causes and Risk Factors

The exact cause of liver hemangiomas is poorly understood, but several factors may increase the likelihood of developing them. Gender plays a significant role, as women are three times more likely to develop liver hemangiomas than men. This higher prevalence in women suggests that hormones, particularly estrogen, may influence the development and growth of these tumors. Hormone therapy, including birth control pills and hormone replacement therapy, may promote the growth of liver hemangiomas. Pregnancy is another factor that can lead to the development of hemangiomas due to the increased levels of estrogen during this period. Having a liver hemangioma doesn't mean you can't become pregnant. However, women who have a liver hemangioma should share that information with their Gynecologist. Although genetics may also play a role, the evidence for a genetic predisposition to liver hemangiomas is not well established. Research continues to explore the potential genetic and environmental factors that contribute to the development of these tumors.

Diagnosis

Liver hemangiomas are often discovered incidentally during imaging tests for other conditions. Once a mass is found within the liver, further testing is required to establish an accurate diagnosis. If your hemangioma doesn't have the typical features, you may need additional imaging to distinguish it from liver cancer. Standard diagnostic methods include Ultrasound, a non-invasive test that uses sound waves to create images of the liver. Ultrasound is often the first test performed when a liver hemangioma is suspected due to its accessibility and cost-effectiveness. A CT scan (Computed Tomography) is another imaging test that provides detailed cross-sectional images of the liver allow a more precise assessment of the hemangioma's size and location. MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is a test that uses magnetic fields and radio waves to produce detailed images of the liver. MRI is the most accurate test for characterizing hemangiomas and differentiating them from other types of liver lesions. These imaging techniques are important for confirming the presence of a hemangioma and planning appropriate management.

Treatment

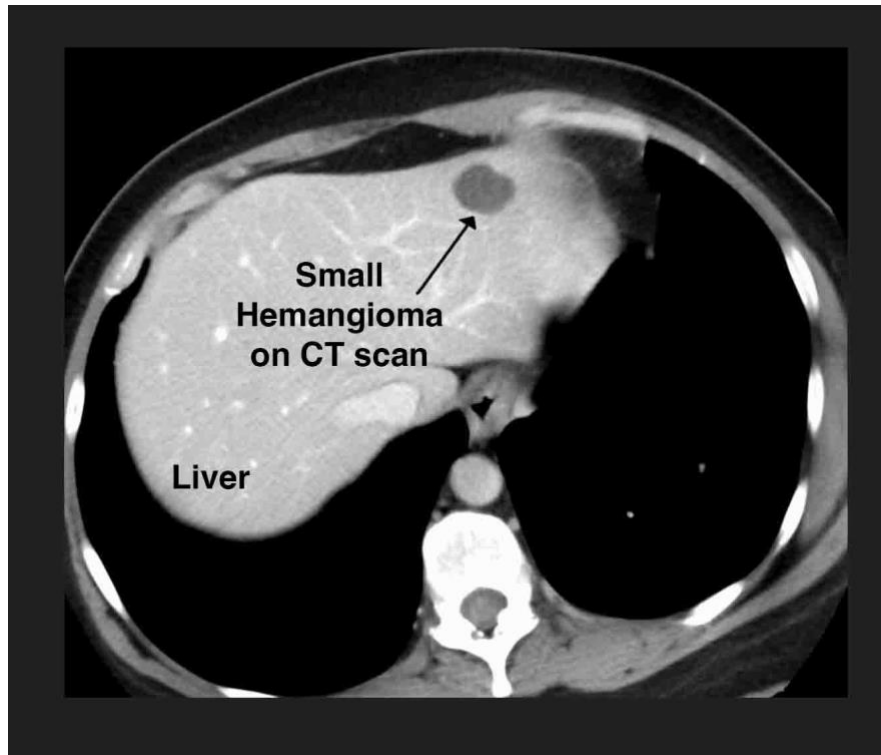
In most cases, liver hemangiomas do not require treatment. However, if a hemangioma is causing symptoms or complications, several treatment options are available. Observation is the most common approach, involving regular monitoring with imaging tests to ensure the hemangioma does not grow or cause symptoms. Medications, such as beta-blockers, can help manage symptoms in some cases, although they are not a primary treatment for hemangiomas. Surgical removal of the hemangioma may be necessary if it is causing significant symptoms or complications, such as severe pain or bleeding. Surgery is generally considered a last resort due to the risks associated with liver surgery. Radiation therapy is rarely used but can shrink the hemangioma if it is not amenable to surgery. This approach is typically reserved for cases where other treatments are not feasible. Another option is Embolization, a procedure that involves blocking the blood supply to the hemangioma, causing it to shrink. This minimally invasive technique can effectively reduce symptoms and prevent further growth. The choice of treatment depends on the hemangioma's size, location, and symptoms, as well as the patient's overall health and preferences.

Living with a Liver Hemangioma

Living with a liver hemangioma usually does NOT impact one's quality of life. However, regular check-ups and monitoring are essential to ensure that the hemangioma does not grow or cause complications. How often to rescan the liver depends on the size, location, and stability of the lesion. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet and regular exercise, is also important to support overall liver health. Patients should stay informed about their condition and communicate with their healthcare providers about any changes in symptoms or concerns. Maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, and avoiding unnecessary medications that can affect liver function are also important. Individuals with liver hemangiomas can lead healthy, active lives with minimal disruption by taking these steps.

Conclusion

Liver hemangiomas are common benign tumors that usually do not require treatment. It may be unsettling to know you have a mass in your liver, even if it's a benign mass. However, there's no evidence that an untreated liver hemangioma can lead to liver cancer. Understanding the condition, its symptoms, causes, and treatment options can help individuals manage their health effectively. Maintaining good digestive health and a healthy lifestyle can further support liver function and overall well-being. Regular monitoring and communication with healthcare providers are essential for managing liver hemangiomas and ensuring they do not lead to complications. Individuals with liver hemangiomas can lead healthy, fulfilling lives by staying informed and proactive.



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