What is that Mark?: Recognizing Sentinel Injuries in Infants

WI CAN Educational Series
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WI CAN News

• 2017 Lecture Schedule is posted on the WI CAN Website
• There are 10 new lectures including topics that were requested by attendees such as FASD!
• Must register in Ethos to obtain continuing education credits (CME, Nursing CE, SW CE and CLE)

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What is that Mark?: Recognizing Sentinel Injuries in Infants

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• The content being presented will be fair, well-balanced and evidence-based
• Learners who wish to receive Continuing Education Credit (CME/CLE/CE) must complete and turn in evaluations to successfully complete this program (through MCW Ethos CE)

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Disclaimers

• Contains disturbing images and scenarios!
• Cases are composites to further de-identify

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Objectives

After this session, the learner will be able to:
• describe the significance of sentinel injuries in pre-cruising infants
• recognize bruises and other 'minor' injuries that suggest abuse
• list potential conditions and skin findings that can be mistaken for abuse injuries

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Skin “marks” overview

- Skin is easily visible and changes can indicate trauma, disease, risk, contact with the environment or just normal variation.
- Size of the “mark” may or may not matter.
  - Tiny marks may indicate underlying disease or serious, potentially life-threatening abuse.
  - Large marks can occur in benign situations.
- The presence or absence of marks does not screen for abuse in infants, toddlers and preschool age children (example – fatal abdominal injury).

Role of photos

- Photos cannot replace an exam.
  - Swelling? Tenderness? Blanching? Injury deeper structures? Wipe off? Other findings not in the photo?
- Assessments based upon photos only are usually more tentative.
- Photos can augment an evaluation.
  - See the “mark” over time.
  - Consider asking for family photos.

Photos - protocol

- Photograph name/date and face.
- Overview photo of body – front and back.
- Perspective photo of the part of the body where there is injury (arm, leg, trunk).
- Close-up photo of injury with and without size scale.
- Knees and shins.
Approach for investigators

- If you look for skin “marks”
  - Good light - use natural light if available; put lotion on the skin if it is dry
  - Move subject or yourself to get different angles
  - What type of “mark” is it?:
    - Injury:
      - Scratch or scrape (abrasion)?
      - Cut (laceration or incised wound)?
      - Burn?
      - Bruise (contusion, petechiae, ecchymosis)?
    - Rash (dermatitis or inflammation) or bug bite?
    - Other - artificial pigment or dye, birthmark (can look like any of the above “marks”), prominent blood vessels, skin coloring

Abrasions (scratches/scrapes)

- Usually the most benign of skin injuries
- Caused by traumatic removal of layers of the epidermis or dermis
- If caused by a narrow object, lesion will appear as a scratch (example - scratch on the face of a baby from her own long fingernails)
- If caused by a broad, often rough object, lesion will appear as a scrape (example - skinned knee or rug ‘burn’)
- Large scrapes can need treatment similar to burns

Abrasions

- Usually caused by something being moved across the skin
- Depending on the type of object and the forces, an object moving across the skin can cause abrasions, bruises, lacerations or all 3!
- Linear injury “marks” can result from:
  - an object moving over the skin;
  - impact against a linear implement/edge
  - “crimping” (shear)
“Cuts” - Lacerations and Incised Wounds

- Lacerations result from blunt trauma and tearing (splitting) of the skin;
- Incised wounds result from sharp objects cutting the skin;
- Both can be associated with bruising along the margins of the wound.

More than skin deep…

BRUISING

What is a bruise?

- Visible blood outside the blood vessels in the skin or soft tissues.
- Many different names:
  - Bruise = contusion
  - Petechiae - small, pin point bruises < 2 mm
  - Ecchymosis – bruising due to seepage of blood around an area of trauma. Usually blue-purple in color and round to irregular in shape. Sometimes used for hematomas > 1 cm
  - Hematoma- nonspecific word for collection of blood with or without swelling
  - Purpura – bruising between 2 mm and 1 cm
Is the ‘mark’ a bruise?

- Photos are insufficient to determine in many cases
- Requires some medical expertise/sophistication
  - Does the ‘mark’ blanch?
  - Is there pain or soft tissue swelling?
  - Are there associated injuries?
  - Does the ‘mark’ heal like a bruise?
  - Are additional tests needed such as X-rays or lab studies?
  - Is the ‘mark’ a bruise mimic?
- Minor ‘marks’ may be very subtle, easily missed or healed
- If the ‘mark’ is a bruise, what does it mean?

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Bruises- what do they mean?

- Is a bruise always just a bruise? What makes a bruise serious?
- Considerations:
  - Age of the child/developmental abilities of the child
  - Specific vulnerabilities of the child
  - Location of the bruise
  - Appearance of the bruise- pattern and size but not color
  - Underlying injury to deeper soft tissues
- Is it a bruise or a mimic?

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Is it just a bruise?

- Need to consider soft tissue, bone and organ injury
- Even fatal abuse may have no or minimal external signs of injury
- Important to know if there is pain, soft tissue swelling or limitation in movement associated with injury (even in obvious abusive injuries)
When should a bruise create suspicion for abuse?

- **Pattern** - bruise that has a recognizable shape or pattern or
- **Location** - bruise in unusual location (anywhere on a young infant or in protected locations such as ear, hand, neck, buttocks, inner thighs) or
- **Age of the baby** - a bruise on an infant who is not yet cruising (infants under 6 mo)
- Often important or “severe” bruises can be very subtle and easily missed!

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Patterns of Bruising/Injury*

- Common patterns of bruising or scarring
- Bites deserve special attention


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Patterned Bruises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Abuse example</th>
<th>Example of Not Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crush - bruise at site of contact</td>
<td>Bite, pinch, grab, mark</td>
<td>Jump onto furniture or fall onto knee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High velocity impact - outline of implement</td>
<td>Hand slap, looped cord, hang</td>
<td>Rare accidents such as a motor belt snapping and striking someone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pressure changes - petechiae</td>
<td>Hickey, strangulation</td>
<td>Hickey, cough, vomiting, crying, rare strangulation accidents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incised wounds (cut) - bruise along edges of wound</td>
<td>Knife wound, fingernail gouge injury</td>
<td>Accidental or blade cut</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lacerations (torn skin with tissue bridges) - bruise at edges of laceration</td>
<td>Punch to face resulting in a laceration</td>
<td>Not resulting in laceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect forces (shearing) - bruise distant to contact</td>
<td>Vertical bruises from basebottom sparking</td>
<td>Genital bruising from vehicle run over event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent - bruise results in blood settling under the effects of gravity</td>
<td>&quot;Black eye&quot; from bruise on forehead</td>
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Petechiae- Pinpoint Bruises

- Causes
  - Mechanical trauma: Blunt impact, or “rubbing,” or crush against a patterned surface
  - Pressure changes
    - Suction
    - Increased venous pressure
  - Removal of epidermis- burns and abrasions
- Significance?
  - Clue to mechanism of injury
  - Tend to resolve more quickly than larger, deeper bruises, but no science to accurately date petechiae

EXAMPLES OF PATTERNS

Location of Bruises

- Normal bruising of childhood usually occurs over bony prominence.
- Ear, genital, buttock, abdominal bruises are suspicious.
- Assess in terms of the overall distribution of bruises!
Age of the child: Sentinel Injuries

- Small, apparently insignificant injuries such as bruises and mouth injuries in young infants are often from abuse
- These “Sentinel Injuries” often precede more serious abuse
- When recognized and responded to, escalation of abuse to fractures, head trauma and infant homicide might be prevented

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<tr>
<td>Bruising in Pre-Cruising Infants</td>
<td>What do we know?</td>
<td>– Bruising in pre-cruising infants is unexpected</td>
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<td>• Published studies are based on physical exams of well infants presumed to be non-abused</td>
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<td>• Cannot completely screen out abused infants</td>
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<td>• Well cohorts contain abused infants</td>
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<td>– Unintentional bruising can occur but is unexpected</td>
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- Mortimer PE. Are facial bruises in babies ever accidental? (Arch Dis Child. 1983;58:75-76)

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<td>Isolated Bruising – Is It Abuse?</td>
<td>Isolated bruising in pre-cruising infants evaluated for abuse</td>
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<td>– &lt; 6 months old evaluated for abuse</td>
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<td>– 50% have other serious injury identified on skeletal survey, neuroimaging or abdominal injury screening</td>
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<td>– 70% were screened for bleeding disorders and none identified</td>
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<td>– Bruising can be the first/only injury from abuse!</td>
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Injury From Abuse Can Escalate

- Injury from abuse can escalate
- Prevention critical
- Background for the sentinel injury research studies

- Facial bruising as a precursor to abusive head trauma. Petska HW, Sheets KL, Knox JL. Clin Pediatr. published online 4/17/2012
- Infants Distress
- Sentinel Injury
- Severe Abuse

- Clinical observations:
  - AHT observations
  - Doctors and family accept implausible explanations. Why?
    - Abuse of an infant is unthinkable
    - Injuries are “minor” or apparently trivial
    - Lack of awareness of bruising significance
    - Biases – families perceived to be low risk
  - How often do abused infants have prior visible injuries and could early detection make a difference?
Prevention Through Early Detection

- Human - prevent abuse to the child and devastation of families
- Financial –
  - Potential estimated savings of $210,000 life-time cost for each case prevented (Fang)
  - >$2,600/year/high risk or maltreated child on Medicaid (Florence)


Definition of Sentinel Injury

- Sentinel injury –
  - Visible/detectable injury reported to have been to at least one parent prior to the events leading to the current admission
  - Occurred at an age when the infant could not cruise and injury was unexplained or poorly explained
  - Examples - bruising or mouth injury in infant < 7 mo
- Example: 6-month old infant with abusive head trauma with these prior injuries
  - Healing rib fractures (not sentinel injuries)
  - History of an unexplained cheek bruise at 2 months of age

SENTINEL INJURY STUDY RESULTS
Ages at Risk

- Crying normally peaks at 1-2 months
- Sentinel Injuries peaked at 2-3 months
- Abusive head trauma peaks at 3-6 months

Prevention

- 25-30% of severely abused infants have a prior history of sentinel injuries (bruising, oral injury or fractures in a pre-cruising infant) (Sheets LK, Leach ME, Koszewski J, Lessmeier AM, Nugent M, Simpson P. Sentinel injuries in infants evaluated for child physical abuse. Pediatrics. 2013;131(4):701-707)
- Most sentinel injuries are ‘minor’ abusive injuries that will heal completely and quickly such as a bruise or a frenulum tear
- Bruises in pre-cruising infants are serious until medically evaluated
- Medical evaluation of concerning injuries should be performed by the most experienced professional available
Reduce CAN Fatalities

• Potential for eliminating a significant percentage of child abuse fatalities
• Improved detection by medical providers, home visitors, daycare personnel, parents, other relatives.
• Enhanced detection must be combined with appropriate injury surveillance and an educated response by LE and CPS

Mouth Injuries

• Common in walking children
• Result from abuse in infants not yet able to walk
• Angry, frustrated caregiver “rams” something in the mouth:

Subconjunctival Hemorrhage

• Unexpected injury in infancy
• Should raise concern for child maltreatment if not well-explained
**Subconjunctival Hemorrhage**

- Rupture of conjunctival capillaries
- Size of hemorrhage not related to the etiology or severity of injury
- Result of direct blow or increased intrathoracic/abdominal pressure
- Differential: trauma, increased intravascular pressure, infection, hematologic and oncologic etiologies

**Subconjunctival Hemorrhage**

- Infants are not usually able to generate sufficient intra-thoracic or intra-abdominal pressure to cause SCH
  - Exception for pertussis which also increases vascular permeability
  - 2/100 infants with pyloric stenosis had SCH (none had RH)
- May or may not have other signs of abuse on exam.

**Isolated Bruising – Is It Abuse?**

- Isolated bruising in pre-cruising infants evaluated for abuse
  - < 6 months old evaluated for abuse
  - 50% have other serious injury identified on skeletal survey, neuroimaging or abdominal injury screening
  - 70% were screened for bleeding disorders and none identified
  - Bruising can be the first/only injury from abuse!

Decision Tree*

Infant with Bruising

Cruising?


Prevention

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Dating Bruises Is Inaccurate!

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Inexpensive bleeding study:

Bleeding work-up

- No national consensus
- Consultation with CHW Hematology has resulted in the following consensus at CHW:
  - “Minor” bleeding such as bruises
    - CBC with auto diff, PT, PT, F, PFS, vWD Activity and antigen
  - Severe bleeding (such as abusive head trauma)
    - Same as above plus Fibrinogen and d-Dimer; consider obtaining a hematology consult

Also see: Thomas AE. The bleeding child: is it NAI? Arch Dis Child. 2004;89:1163-1167

When does a possible bruise need medical evaluation?

- Any suspected injury in a pre-cruising infant All patterned injuries
- Suspected excessive discipline with an implement
- Bruising on the neck, hands, feet, ears, genitals, anal area, buttocks in young children

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**Siblings and contacts- How much work-up?**

- 2012 Lindberg et al. (Pediatrics. 2012;130:1-9)- ExSTRA multisite research study:
  - Found ~12% of contacts under 2 y/o had abusive fractures
  - Twins at substantially increased risk of fracture when the index child was the other twin; odds ration 20x!!

**Abuse Mimics**

- Accidental bruising
- Self-inflicted injury
- Birthmarks- vascular and pigmented
- Cultural treatments
- Bleeding disorders
- Rashes and other skin conditions
- Pigments such as markers
- Venous Congestion, especially between the eyes and in the perianal area

**Benign Blue Spots 'Mongolian Spots'**

- Congenital dermal melanocytosis or benign blue spots of infancy
- May be absent at birth.
- Can gradually become more prominent over the first few months of life
- Can occur in unusual locations
- Occurs in infants of any ethnicity/race
Folk Remedies

• Cao gio (Coin Rubbing)
  – Practiced in Southeast Asia and Southern China
  – Coin is rubbed against oiled skin, causing stripes of petechial bruising
  – Motive is healing
  – Quat sha (Spooning) is similar, except uses a porcelain spoon

Medical Input

• Medical evaluation plus photos is best strategy
• Seek medical evaluation by most experienced provider
• If unsure, seek advice (triage) from closest center of excellence
• Don’t assume that MD = best provider
• Ask about what alternative hypotheses (differential diagnoses) were considered

• There are many conditions mistaken for child maltreatment and there are many maltreatment injuries missed or mistaken for other conditions
• Medical expertise (highest quality available) usually necessary when abuse is suspected, even in “obvious” cases
• Important to consider organ and bone injury in infants, toddlers and preschoolers
Key Points

• Ask about sentinel injuries
• Seek a qualified examination of infants with suspected injury in good light and completely undressed
• Pay attention to minor injuries – ask questions
• When unsure, call a child abuse expert for advice
• Think about other conditions that can mimic abuse
• Look for occult (hidden injury) by performing full work-ups in children suspected of being physically abused – unless injury is clearly explained by history
• Remember – the lack of occult injuries does not rule out abuse!
• Offer resources to parents of distressed infants

Questions?

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