

Dear Expecting Families:

My name is Miriam Karsh and I was born with a vascular birthmark on my face. As my *bat mitzvah* project, I decided to inform expecting families about how to prevent a birthmark from affecting your child's life. Birthmarks can disfigure or affect vision permanently. The Vascular Birthmarks Foundation (VBF) can put you in touch with the right specialist to help.

Very early treatment is key in preventing problems from birthmarks. We asked one vascular birthmark specialist how early, and he said "on the way out of the delivery room". Unfortunately many parents and pediatricians don't know this, and this is why we are writing to you now.

There are different types of vascular birthmarks. Port-wine stains never go away but can be lightened a lot with certain expertly operated lasers. The earlier a specialist treats, the more likely that she can prevent bleeding and other complications. By its location, a specialist can also tell if a facial port-wine stain might mean Sturge-Weber syndrome, a neurological disease confirmed by MRI.

The kind of vascular birthmark which I have is an infantile hemangioma. These grow fast after birth, but this growth can now be prevented or greatly reduced with laser, surgical removal, and an inexpensive drug called propranolol, which shrinks them. A combination of treatments makes them easier to treat.

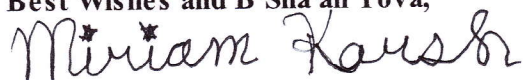
Unfortunately, because most parents and pediatricians do not know the benefits of early treatment, many children end up with permanent and harmful lesions with complications. Medical schools rarely cover this subject, and textbooks contain outdated information. For example, textbooks say that hemangiomas like mine resolve on their own, but only 40% really do. The remaining 60% require surgery or laser treatment. Vascular birthmarks must be evaluated individually and early by a specialist for the best results..

The VBF and the American Academy of Pediatrics are working on Babies with Birthmarks Guidelines so that family doctors and pediatricians will refer infants with birthmarks early to specialists. So, if your child is born with a vascular birthmark, I hope you will not wait, and will contact the VBF early for diagnosis and if needed, for special treatment referral. Not everyone with a laser knows how to use it, or whom to use it on! Be sure to go to a vascular birthmark specialist, not simply a pediatrician, plastic surgeon, or dermatologist. .

VBF has a conference every year at which specialists provide free education, diagnosis, and treatment plans. The VBF also has an international humanitarian team of physicians and surgeons which goes on special trips to other countries to perform free surgery. Donations to VBF from all of us support these events. If you want more information about this great organization and what it does, then go to [www.birthmark.org](http://www.birthmark.org).

I hope your child does not have a birthmark so that you don't need this information, but that you will share it with anyone you know who does.

**Best Wishes and B'Sha'ah Tova,**



**Miriam Karsh**