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Patient education: Henoch-Schönlein purpura (IgA vasculitis) (The Basics)
Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is Henoch-Schönlein purpura (IgA vasculitis)? — Henoch-Schönlein purpura, also known as IgA vasculitis, is a condition that usually causes a rash. It is often called just "HSP" or "IgAV."

The rash looks like tiny raised bruises (picture 1). HSP (IgAV) tends to affect children between the ages of 3 and 15, but it can affect adults, too. The symptoms of HSP (IgAV) usually go away on their own in about a month.

What are the symptoms of HSP (IgAV)? — The symptoms can include:

- A rash that looks like tiny raised bruises (picture 1)
- Joint pain
- Swelling around the joints
- Belly pain and upset stomach

The rash caused by HSP (IgAV) is usually the first symptom of the disorder, but not everyone gets a rash. Sometimes the first symptoms are joint pain and swelling around the joints.

Some children also have symptoms affecting the stomach or intestines. For example, some children have nausea or vomiting. Others can have more serious problems, including something called "intussusception." Intussusception is when the intestine folds into itself like a telescope. This can cause a blockage in the intestine and severe belly pain.

HSP (IgAV) can also cause problems with the kidneys (especially in adults), scrotum (in boys), and other organs.

HSP (IgAV) usually causes symptoms only for a month or so. Then it goes away without causing any long-term problems. Some people, though, can have longer lasting kidney problems.

Is there a test for HSP (IgAV)? — There are tests that can help diagnose HSP (IgAV), but they are not always necessary. When HSP (IgAV) causes a rash, doctors and nurses can usually tell what it is just by looking at the rash and doing a routine exam.

If a doctor or nurse is unsure about whether HSP (IgAV) is the problem, he or she can order a "biopsy." For a biopsy, a doctor or nurse takes a small sample of tissue to look at under the microscope. The sample can come from a part of the skin that has the rash or, less often, from the kidneys.

If you or your child has HSP (IgAV), the doctor or nurse will also want to do urine tests and blood pressure checks about once a week for a month or two. This is to check for signs of kidney problems.

Should I see a doctor or nurse? — Yes. If you or your child develops symptoms of HSP (IgAV), see a doctor or nurse.

How is HSP (IgAV) treated? — Treatment mostly involves getting plenty of fluids, resting, and taking medicines to control pain, if they are needed. Most people can stay at home until they get better. People who have severe symptoms sometimes need to be treated at the hospital.

To manage joint or belly pain, doctors recommend medicines called NSAIDs. NSAIDs are a large group of medicines that include naproxen (sample brand name: Aleve) and ibuprofen (sample brand names: Advil,

Motrin). People who do not get enough relief from these medicines sometimes get medicines called steroids, which help relieve inflammation. These steroids are not the same ones that athletes take to build up muscle.

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GRAPHICS

Henoch-Schönlein purpura (IgA vasculitis)

Children with Henoch-Schönlein purpura (IgA vasculitis) often develop a rash that looks like this on their legs and thighs.

Graphic 83025 Version 2.0