

Cradle Cap

Definition

- A scaly rash on the scalp that starts in newborns

Symptoms

- Yellow scales and crusts attached to the scalp
- Occurs in patches
- Scales can be greasy or dry
- Not itchy or painful
- Begins in the first 2 to 6 weeks of life

Cause

- Cradle cap is probably caused by hormones from the mother. These hormones cross the placenta before birth. The hormones cause the oil glands in the skin to become overactive. They then release more oil than normal.
- Dead skin cells normally fall off. The extra oil causes these cells to "stick" to the skin. These cells form yellow crusts and scales on the scalp.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Cradle cap is a common skin condition of newborns.
- It's caused by overactive oil glands in the scalp.
- It's harmless and will go away on its own. But it takes time.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Shampoo:

- Wash the hair with an anti-dandruff shampoo (OTC, such as Selsun Blue or Head & Shoulders) twice a week. (Note: The daily use of anti-dandruff shampoo isn't approved until after 2 years old. But, using it twice a week is fine.)

3. Scalp Massage:

- While the hair is lathered, massage the scalp with a soft brush or fine tooth comb. You can also use a rough washcloth or your fingers for 5 minutes. Don't worry about hurting the soft spot.

4. Baby Oil:

- If the scalp has thick crusts (scales), put some baby oil or coconut oil on the scalp. Do this for 15 minutes before shampooing to soften the crusts.
- Wash all the oil off, however, or it may worsen the cradle cap. (Reason: The oil blocks the oil glands on the baby's scalp.)
- Do not use olive oil. (Reason: may increase the growth of yeast)
- Cradle cap lotions for loosening up the scales are also available without a prescription. Apply the lotion 15 minutes before shampooing.

5. **Steroid Cream:**

- If the rash on the scalp is red and irritated, use 1% hydrocortisone cream. No prescription is needed.
- Put this on once a day.
- After 1 hour, wash it off with soap and water.
- Do this for 7 days or less.

6. **Expected Course:**

- Cradle cap will eventually go away on its own between 6 and 12 months of age. Usually, it doesn't cause any symptoms (such as pain or itching).
- Therefore, treatment is optional. It is mainly done for cosmetic reasons.
- Shampoos, lotions and brushing will reduce the thickness of the scales. They will usually make them go away sooner.

7. **Return to Child Care:**

- Cradle cap cannot be spread to others.
- Your child does not need to miss any child care.

Call Your Doctor Back If...

- Gets worse with treatment
- Lasts over 12 months of age
- You think your child needs to be seen

This handout is intended for informational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of a medical professional. The accuracy of the information contained in this handout is not guaranteed and there may be variations in treatment that your doctor or nurse may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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