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“Cradle Cap”

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Although cradle cap is often a very mild condition that simply causes a little flaking on a baby's scalp, some infants can have more extensive cradle cap with thick scaling that distresses some parents. Still, it is important to remember that cradle cap, no matter how bad it looks, is almost always a harmless condition.

Symptoms of Cradle Cap

Cradle cap is usually easy to recognize, with symptoms that can include a scalp rash that:

- is dry and flaky
- has thick, greasy, yellow or brown scales
- has red patches with crust
- is sometimes itchy

Treatments for Cradle Cap

For mild cradle cap, time is often the best treatment, as many children get better on their own by the time they are about a year old.

When treatment for cradle cap is necessary, most experts recommend that you begin with home remedies, such as frequently shampooing your baby's hair with a mild baby shampoo and then using a soft brush to try and brush off the scales.

Another common home remedy for cradle cap is to rub in a little baby oil or mineral oil into your baby's scalp, leave it on for 10 or 15 minutes, which should soften the scales, brush off the scales with a soft brush, and then shampoo off the oil. Remember that leaving the oil on too long may make the cradle cap worse.

Your pediatrician may recommend other treatments for more extensive cases of cradle cap, including:

- applying a steroid cream or lotion, starting with an OTC steroid, such as Cortaid®, and moving up to something like Derma-Smoothe FS® lotion for really tough cases, especially if the scalp around the scales is very red and irritated
- washing your child's hair with an antiseborrheic or antidandruff shampoo such as Selsun Blue®, Sebulex® shampoo, or T-Gel® a few times a week
- prescribing an antibiotic for secondary infections of the scalp
- using a topical or oral antifungal medication or antifungal shampoo

What You Need To Know

Once you get your child's cradle cap treated, you often have to take steps, such as continuing to use an antiseborrheic shampoo, to prevent it from coming back.

Some children with cradle cap also have the rash behind their ears and in the creases of their neck, arms, face, and diaper area, at which time it is called seborrheic dermatitis. Although this rash can resemble eczema, unlike eczema, it is usually not very itchy.

Cradle cap is thought to be influenced by maternal hormones a baby gets during pregnancy, which can over stimulate oil glands.

Infants with widespread seborrheic dermatitis and other symptoms, such as failure to thrive or chronic diarrhea, may have other conditions, such as Leiner's disease or Langerhans cell histiocytosis X.

Some experts think that cradle cap might be a mild yeast infection caused by *Malassezia furfur*, which is why topical and oral antifungal medications are sometimes used as treatments for extensive cradle cap.

Although many children outgrow cradle cap by the time they are 12 months old, some children continue to have some scale until they are much older. It is usually much milder and harder to notice than when they were younger though.