

4 Cradle Cap Treatment Options

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As you lean in to take a sniff of your newborn's head, arguably the most delicious scent, you suddenly recoil in horror. You notice huge flakes of dried, yellowish skin coming off of the top of their scalp.

What in the world is going on, you wonder. Does your baby have dandruff? Are you a terrible parent? Is this some kind of skin disease you need to be concerned about?

Don't worry. Your baby likely has "cradle cap," a very common condition in newborns and young babies. It's not life-threatening. Here's how to clear it up.

What is cradle cap?

Cradle cap is a skin rash that's also known as "seborrheic dermatitis." It's a type of skin condition that occurs where there are a high number of oil glands on the skin, such as the scalp, face, and diaper area.

Oil and excess skin cells cause a buildup that looks like white or yellowish scales on top of the head.

When the rash occurs only on the head, it's seborrheic dermatitis, most commonly just called "cradle cap." The rash is not an infection, and unlike eczema, it's only mildly itchy and usually not uncomfortable for your baby. It occurs most often in the first few weeks of life and usually disappears completely on its own after a few months.

How to treat cradle cap at home

Even if cradle cap isn't dangerous or uncomfortable to your baby, it can still be rather surprising to see in your newborn. Fortunately, there are a few ways you can treat it at home.

1. Change up your baby's shampoo



Baby shampoo may be the culprit to your baby's cradle cap. Switching to a different brand or a more natural version of baby shampoo, free of harsh preservatives and fragrances, may help.

But you shouldn't completely stop using shampoo on your baby's head. Instead, try using a mild baby shampoo or even a stronger medicated shampoo with 2 percent salicylic acid. This can help loosen those scales on the scalp.

But keep in mind that newborn skin is very sensitive. Don't try any medicated shampoo, even if it's over the counter, without talking to your baby's doctor first.

2. Brush your baby's head



Does this treatment sound a bit odd? It might, but it's very effective. Using a comb or brush is the best way to loosen and remove the scaly buildup on your baby's scalp.

Use a small comb, such as one that the hospital sends home with you. In the bath or while running warm water over your baby's scalp under the skin, gently run the comb over the scales to help loosen and remove them.

Whatever you do, don't pick at the scales with your fingers, or peel the scales off if they are not already almost off. You may hurt the baby's skin or transfer bacteria that could lead to a skin infection on your baby's head.

3. Moisturize your baby's scalp



After you remove the scales, it may be helpful to apply some kind of moisturizer to the scalp to lock in moisture and help prevent the skin from overproducing oil and skin cells again.

You can try petroleum jelly or simple baby lotion. Mineral oil and baby oil work too.

4. Try hydrocortisone cream



In some severe cases, a 1-percent hydrocortisone cream may be helpful to calm the skin and lower the scale production. But you shouldn't apply any medicated ointment or cream to your baby without instruction from your pediatrician. Your pediatrician can discuss and advise when

it would be appropriate to use it, and the timing and quantity.

In some cases, the cradle cap can also develop into a yeast infection. If the scaly area becomes increasingly reddened or causes your baby discomfort, be sure to have a doctor examine your baby.

Next steps

Cradle cap is a very common infant skin condition. It's not dangerous or uncomfortable to your baby. You can usually manage cradle cap at home by washing your baby's head with a mild shampoo, loosening the scales gently with a comb or brush, and keeping the area moisturized.

Most cases of cradle cap will clear up in a few weeks. See your pediatrician if you're concerned or if it lasts more than several months.



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