
Cradle cap

Summary

- Cradle cap is a form of dermatitis that affects some babies in their first few months of life.
 - Signs include greasy, yellow crusts on the scalp.
 - Massaging the scalp at night with a mineral oil, followed by washing the hair and scalp next morning, lifting the crusts with a soft brush, may help.
-

Cradle cap is an inflammatory skin condition that affects babies. It causes yellow crusts on the scalp. It is commonly present in the first three months of life, and is rare after the age of one year. It is a form of seborrhoeic dermatitis.

Cradle cap usually clears by itself after a few months, but many parents prefer to remove it because they do not like the look of it. If scaly patches are severe or appear on the face or other parts of the body, you may wish to seek help from your doctor. Cradle cap is not contagious and it is not caused by poor hygiene or bad parenting.

Symptoms of cradle cap

The signs of cradle cap include:

- Reddening of the skin
- Greasiness
- Scales or flakes on the scalp
- Yellow crusts.

Causes of cradle cap

Sebaceous glands in the scalp make sebum, which oils the skin. It is thought that babies have high levels of maternal hormones in their bodies for several weeks or months following birth and these hormones enlarge the glands, making more sebum. Some component in the sebum, as yet unknown, causes skin inflammation.

Home treatment of cradle cap

Mild cradle cap usually gets better without treatment after a few weeks. It may help if you:

- Loosen the crusts by massaging the scalp with mineral oil (such as baby oil) at night, then wash the hair with a baby shampoo the next morning, gently lifting the crusts off with a soft brush (a soft toothbrush can be good for this). Try this each day until your baby's scalp looks clearer.
- Use a mild antidandruff shampoo if the other treatment is not working – be careful, these shampoos can irritate a baby's eyes more than shampoos made for babies.

The cradle cap can come back, even when treated properly, because the glands continue to produce sebum for several months after birth.

Infection and cradle cap

Sometimes, the skin under the crusts of cradle cap can become infected. The skin becomes redder and small blisters appear, and then pop and weep. This is caused by the same germs that cause impetigo ('school sores').

If this infection spreads, or your baby becomes unwell, make sure that you have your baby checked by a doctor. Your baby may need antibiotics to get rid of the infection. Unlike cradle cap, impetigo is highly contagious.

Seek medical advice

If your baby's cradle cap isn't improving, or seems to be spreading to other areas of the face or body, it is

important to seek medical help.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Pharmacist
- Maternal and child health nurse

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Sinclair Dermatology

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2020 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.