



Cradle Cap

What is cradle cap?

Cradle cap is a common skin condition in babies. Cradle cap appears as red patches with oily, yellow scales or crusts on the scalp. It often begins in the first weeks of life. With treatment it will clear up in a few weeks. Without treatment it will go away on its own after several months.

What is the cause?

Cradle cap is probably caused by hormones from the mother that crossed the placenta before birth. The hormones cause the oil glands in the skin to become overactive and release more oil than normal. This causes the dead skin cells that normally fall off to "stick" to the skin and form yellow crusts and scales.

How can I take care of my child?

- Antidandruff shampoo

Buy an antidandruff shampoo (nonprescription) at the drugstore. Wash your baby's hair with it once a day. While the hair is lathered, massage your baby's scalp with a soft brush or rough washcloth. Don't worry about hurting the soft spot. Once the cradle cap has cleared up, use a regular shampoo twice a week.

- Softening thick crusts

If your child's scalp is very crusty, put some baby oil or olive oil on the scalp 1 hour before washing to soften the crust. Wash all the oil off, however, or it may worsen the cradle cap.

- Resistant cases of cradle cap

If the area is very red and irritated, apply 1% hydrocortisone cream (nonprescription) once a day. Rub in a small amount. After 1 hour, wash the area with soap and water. Do this for no more than 7 days.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The cradle cap lasts more than 2 weeks with treatment.
- The rash spreads beyond the scalp.
- You have other concerns or questions.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.