

■ Cradle Cap (Seborrheic Dermatitis of Newborns) ■

Cradle cap is a common skin condition in newborns. A greasy, scaly rash develops on the baby's scalp. The rash may also occur on the face, the area behind the ears, the diaper area, and sometimes other areas. The problem generally clears up by age 1 year and responds to some simple treatments.

What is cradle cap?

Cradle cap is a usually harmless skin condition affecting infants. A rash develops on your baby's scalp and other areas, generally within the first few months. Cradle cap is also known as "seborrheic dermatitis."

The cause of cradle cap is unknown. It may be related to hormones from the mother remaining in the baby's body for a while after birth. (The hormones make the glands in the baby's skin overproduce an oily substance called sebum, thereby allowing dead skin cells to build up on the scalp.) It may take several months before cradle cap clears up completely. Simple treatments can be helpful.

What does it look like?

- A scaly, yellowish rash develops on your baby's scalp, usually in the first few months. Although often greasy, it may appear dry. The skin of his or her scalp may appear reddened at times, and the rash may become crusted.
- Scaly patches may also occur on the face, especially the forehead, behind the ears, and along the eyebrows. The underarms and diaper area may also be involved.

- The rash may or may not cause any itching or other discomfort to the baby.

How is cradle cap diagnosed?

- Cradle cap is a common condition in newborns. Usually no special tests are needed to make the diagnosis.
- When it involves the face and other areas of the body, cradle cap can look so similar to eczema that it may be difficult to tell them apart.

How is cradle cap treated?

The problem clears up over time, although it may still be present up to age 1 year. A number of different treatments may be recommended, depending on how severe the rash is.

- Massage mineral oil into your baby's scalp and leave it on for a while to loosen up scale and crusting. Then wash the scale using baby shampoo. Do this a few times a week.
- If mineral oil treatment doesn't work well enough, the doctor may recommend a weak steroid lotion. Apply this medication to the scalp a few times a week.
- Washing with dandruff shampoo can be helpful. However, be careful when using these shampoos—they can be irritating, especially to the eyes.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if the rash doesn't improve with treatment or if it gets worse.