

CHILDREN'S HEALTH - HEALTH & WELLNESS

Cradle Cap: How to Recognize It (& Get Rid Of It)

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If your baby has cradle cap, you know the scaly scalp condition isn't pretty. The good news, however, is that cradle cap isn't harmful. We checked in with two experts to find out exactly what is cradle cap, what causes it, how to get rid of cradle cap, and more. Keep reading for the real deal.



What is cradle cap?

If you're wondering what causes cradle cap, you're not alone. Cradle cap (or [seborrheic dermatitis](#)) is a childhood form of dandruff that is common in babies, says Robert H. Pantell, M.D., a Professor of Pediatrics Emeritus at the University of California, San Francisco, and author of the book *Taking Care of Your Child*. He sees the condition often in his office. It typically appears when babies are a few weeks old and often goes away on its own after a few weeks or months. Don't worry: Although cradle cap isn't pretty, it isn't bothersome to your baby.

What are the symptoms of it?

Symptoms vary, however, the condition often results in:

- Scales of thick, crusty skin on your baby's scalp
- The flakes often appear white or yellow in color
- The skin around the flakes can be red
- While it's most common on the top of the head, cradle cap can also be found on your baby's ears, nose, eyelids, and even in her groin area.

What causes cradle cap?

Doctors have different theories on what causes cradle cap:

- Some doctors, including Alan M. Dattner, M.D., a holistic dermatologist based in New York City, believe that it's an **immune response** to yeast living in the baby's scalp.
- Another theory is that **your hormones**, which your baby gets when he breastfeeds, cause cradle cap, says Dr. Pantell.

- Lastly, **dried oils**, either natural or applied, may accumulate on your baby's scalp and cause the condition to develop, says Charles Shubin, M.D., Director of Pediatrics at Mercy Family Health, in Baltimore, Maryland.

Although doctors have differing opinions on what causes cradle cap, they all agree on one thing: Cradle cap is not a serious medical condition.

How does cradle cap treatment involve?

How to get rid of cradle cap varies. Oftentimes, cradle cap disappears on its own after a few weeks or months, however you can treat it at home if you wish. "Use a fine-tooth comb or soft scrub brush to help remove the scales, then shampoo with Sebulex or a dandruff shampoo, which your pediatrician can prescribe," says Dr. Pantell. (Yes, you don't need a special cradle cap shampoo, necessary; an over-the-counter dandruff shampoo can totally do the trick; just be sure to check in with your pediatrician first.) Of course, be careful to avoid getting shampoo in your baby's sensitive eyes.

Why do some babies get cradle cap and not others?

Whether your baby gets cradle cap depends on the type of skin she has, says Dr. Shubin. "It is thought that babies don't get it unless they have sensitive skin, such as with eczema."

When should you see a doctor?

Even though cradle cap is harmless, there are some instances when you should see your doctor:

- **Your baby's cradle cap gets worse, or doesn't go away.** You may notice that the scales persist or are thicker, or your baby's scalp is red, says Dr. Dattner.
- **The patches on his head are itchy.** It may be eczema.
- **You see signs of infection,** such as the area feels hot, begins to drain liquid, or the skin feels firm.

Make some notes to bring with you to your appointment. Outline how long your baby has had the condition, what you've done to try and treat it, and how often you wash her hair.

Remember, while cradle cap may look yucky, it isn't harmful and it only lasts a short time. Soon, your baby will be back to normal!

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