



CRADLE CAP

What is cradle cap?

Cradle cap is the greasy, yellow scaly patches that sometimes appear on the scalps of young babies. It is common, harmless and doesn't usually itch or cause discomfort. The scales flake and may make the affected skin look red. Sometimes the hair will come away with the flakes, but it will grow back.

Do not pick at the scales as this can cause an infection. Cradle cap is not contagious and is not caused by poor hygiene or an allergy. It's not clear what causes cradle cap, although it may be linked to high levels of an oily substance called sebum on affected areas or a reaction to a yeast called malassezia on the skin.

Cradle cap is a type of seborrhoeic dermatitis, a common irritation that affects oily skin in children and adults. It usually appears in babies in the first two months and clears up without treatment within weeks to a few months.



It usually occurs on the scalp but can also affect the face, ears, neck, nappy area and armpits, and behind the knees. (Photograph courtesy of NHS Choices)

Treatment for cradle cap

Most cases of cradle cap clear up on their own without the need for treatment within weeks to a few months.

Tips to help reduce the build-up of scales on the scalp:

- regular washing of the scalp with a baby shampoo, followed by gentle brushing with a soft brush to loosen scales.
- soften the scales with baby oil first, followed by gentle brushing, and then wash off with baby shampoo.
- soak the crusts overnight with white petroleum jelly, or vegetable or olive oil, and shampoo in the morning.

If these methods don't work, speak to your pharmacist about using a greasy emollient or soap substitute, such as emulsifying ointment.

There is usually no need to see your GP if your baby has cradle cap. However, you may want to ask them for advice if there is swelling to the scalp or if the cradle cap spreads to other parts of the body.

More information about cradle cap can be found at www.nhs.uk