Vernon Pediatrics

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CRADLE CAP

Cradle cap causes crusty or oily scaly patches on a baby's scalp. The condition is not painful or itchy. But it can cause thick white or yellow scales that are not easy to remove.

Cradle cap usually clears up on its own in weeks or a few months. Home care measures include washing your baby's scalp daily with a mild shampoo. This can help you loosen and remove the scales. Do not scratch cradle cap. If cradle cap persists or seems severe, your doctor may suggest a medicated shampoo, lotion or other treatment.

Symptoms

Common signs of cradle cap include:

- Patchy scaling or thick crusts on the scalp
- Oily or dry skin covered with flaky white or yellow scales
- Skin flakes
- Possibly mild redness

Similar scales may also be present on the ears, eyelids, nose and groin.

Cradle cap is common in newborns. It usually is not itchy. Cradle cap is the common term for infantile seborrheic dermatitis. It is sometimes confused with another skin condition, atopic dermatitis. A major difference between these conditions is that atopic dermatitis usually causes significant itching.

When to see a doctor

See your baby's doctor if:

- You have tried treating it at home without success
- The patches spread to your baby's face or body.

Causes

The cause of cradle cap is not known. One contributing factor may be hormones that pass from the mother to the baby before birth. These hormones can cause too much production of oil (sebum) in the oil glands and hair follicles.

Another factor may be a yeast (fungus) called malassezia (mal-uh-SEE-zhuh) that grows in the sebum along with bacteria. Antifungal treatments, such as ketoconazole, are often effective, supporting the idea that yeast is a contributing factor.

Cradle cap is not contagious, and it is not caused by poor hygiene.

Prevention

Shampooing your baby's hair every few days can help prevent cradle cap. Stick with a mild baby shampoo unless your baby's doctor recommends something stronger.