

Seborrheic Dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis is a chronic scaling condition of the skin that usually involves the scalp and face, and sometimes the ears and chest. It often causes itching and flaking. Seborrheic dermatitis of the scalp is also called dandruff.

What causes seborrheic dermatitis?

The cause is not known, but some recent evidence suggests that it may be partially caused by a reaction to fungus/yeast that normally live on the skin. Seborrheic dermatitis is not influenced by diet, and it is not contagious. It can appear at any age, and often follows a random course of improvement and worsening.

How is it treated?

Although there is no cure for seborrheic dermatitis, it can be controlled. Treatment options are listed below:

- Medicated shampoos are very effective and will help keep the dermatitis under control if used regularly. These shampoos should be used about **3 times per week**. Daily hair washing is recommended in seborrheic dermatitis, so you can use your regular shampoo on days that you don't use the medicated shampoos. Try to leave the shampoo on the scalp at least 3-5 minutes so that the medication has time to penetrate into the scalp.
 - There are different active ingredients found in medicated shampoos. Some of them include:
 - **Selenium sulfide** (Head and Shoulders Intensive Treatment, Selsun Blue, Exsel)
 - **Ketoconazole** (Nizoral A-D)
 - **Salicylic acid** (Neutrogena T-Sal)
 - **Coal tar** (Neutrogena T-Gel, DHS tar, Tegrin)
 - **Zinc pyrithione** (Head and Shoulders, DHS zinc, Pert Dandruff Control)
 - Rotating between two medicated shampoos with different ingredients appears to work better than using one shampoo continuously.
- Steroid products such as **hydrocortisone 1%** cream or liquid can be used for short periods of time during flare-ups. They are typically applied twice daily to the affected areas and should be discontinued as soon as the flare-up subsides. In general, steroid products should not be used longer than 2 to 3 weeks continuously, as they can cause thinning of the skin.

When seborrheic dermatitis occurs on the face or other non-scalp areas, treatment is similar:

- Antifungal creams such as **clotrimazole cream** or **miconazole cream** can be used safely as either maintenance therapy or as therapy for flare-ups
- **1% Hydrocortisone cream** twice a day is effective as a short-term therapy for flare-ups
- Any of the shampoos listed above can be used on non-scalp areas, much like a lotion. As some of them may be irritating to sensitive skin, test them out before using. Also, be sure to avoid the eyes, as they can burn or sting.