

# Seborrheic Dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis (often referred to as seborrhea) is an inflammatory skin condition that most often affects the scalp, face, neck, and—less frequently—the chest, armpits and genital area. It can occur at any age. When it's mild and affecting the scalp only, it's simply referred to as "dandruff." A special type of seborrheic dermatitis affects infants and is known as "cradle cap." The symptoms of seborrheic dermatitis vary, but usually consist of redness and flakiness of the skin—particularly noticeable at the hairline, in the eyebrows, or behind the ears. Sometimes the scales have a slightly greasy feel. The affected areas can be very itchy or not itch at all.

Although there is no real cure for seborrheic dermatitis, medicated shampoos, creams, and lotions usually control it very well.

The shampoos that are currently available range from over-the-counter products to prescription shampoos. The prescription shampoos are simply stronger versions of the non-prescription products. Both contain the same three basic ingredients including selenium sulfide, zinc, or coal tar. All the shampoos are used from two to seven days a week, and should be left on lathered up for 10 to 15 minutes before rinsing off. For those with seborrhea limited to the scalp, the use of one of these shampoos alone will usually clear up the skin condition. A month may be required for good results, and the shampoo may need to be used once a week on an ongoing basis.

Sometimes you may find that a shampoo you have used for years is no longer effective. If this happens, try shifting to another brand containing a different active ingredient. If dandruff shampoos alone do not work, use hydrocortisone 1% lotion on the scalp once or twice a day (such as Neutrogena T-scalp).

"Cradle cap" is a type of seborrheic dermatitis in infants that is a little different from adult seborrhea. The scales on a baby's scalp can become quite thick, and sometimes a bit yellowish and oily. Once every day or two, mineral oil can be applied to the scalp for about an hour to soften the scales. This can then be followed by a shampoo, with gentle brushing or combing to remove the loose scales. You can use an anti-dandruff shampoo once or twice a week, such as Sebulex or Selsun Blue. Be careful, however, to keep the shampoo out of your baby's eyes.

To treat seborrheic dermatitis that affects the face or other areas, a one percent solution of hydrocortisone cream, such as Cortaid, is usually effective and can be used even in young children.

If home treatment with over-the-counter products isn't effective after 10 to 14 days, call your doctor or other health care professional. You may need a prescription-strength shampoo or cream, or you may have another condition entirely.



Use these Kaiser Permanente resources for reliable health information:

- ❖ Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, message boards, health classes, and much more.
- ❖ Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- ❖ Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, or other resources.
- ❖ With a *Kaiser Permanente Healthphone Directory*, you can pick topics and messages to hear on Kaiser Permanente Healthphone (1-800-332-7563; TTY: 1-800-777-9059). Request a *Directory* from your Health Center or Department or download a copy at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org). (Search "Healthphone".)

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