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Cradle Cap

What is cradle cap?

Cradle cap is a common skin condition in babies. Cradle cap appears as red patches with oily, yellow scales or crusts on the scalp. It's harmless and will eventually go away on its own.

What is the cause?

Cradle cap is probably caused by hormones from the mother that crossed the placenta before birth. The hormones cause the oil glands in the skin to become overactive and release more oil than normal. This causes the dead skin cells that normally fall off to "stick" to the skin and form yellow crusts and scales.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Antidandruff shampoo**

Buy an antidandruff shampoo (nonprescription) at the drugstore. Wash your baby's hair with it twice a week. While the hair is lathered, massage your baby's scalp with a soft brush or rough washcloth. Don't worry about hurting the soft spot. Once the cradle cap has cleared up, use a regular baby shampoo twice a week.

- **Softening thick crusts**

If your child's scalp is very crusty, put some baby oil on the scalp 15 minutes before washing to soften the crust. Wash all the oil off, however, or it may worsen the cradle cap. Cradle cap lotions for loosening up the scales are also available without a prescription. Apply the lotion 15 minutes before shampooing.

- **Resistant cases of cradle cap**

If the area is very red and irritated, apply 1% hydrocortisone cream (nonprescription) once a day. Rub in a small amount. After 1 hour, wash the area with soap and water. Do this for no more than 7 days.

- **Expected Course**

Cradle cap will eventually go away on its own between 6 and 12 months of age. Usually it doesn't cause any symptoms (such as pain or itching). Therefore treatment is optional and mainly done for cosmetic reasons.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The cradle cap lasts more than 12 months.
- The rash spreads beyond the scalp.
- You have other concerns or questions.