Paediatric department

Cradle cap ‘infantile seborrheic dermatitis’

What is cradle cap?
Cradle cap also called “infantile seborrheic dermatitis” is a harmless skin condition in babies.

Cradle cap can appear as crusting or greasy brown, yellow or white patches on a baby’s scalp. Where this skin flakes off, skin underneath can sometimes look inflamed.

Cradle cap can also appear in other places such as a baby’s nose, eyebrows, eyelids and nappy areas. It is not itchy or painful for your baby, and it usually clears up on its own.

It is not clear what causes cradle cap, but it is most common in babies aged 3 weeks - 12 months. Babies can’t catch it from other babies or pass it on.

What can I do to help treat cradle cap at home?

Do
✓ gently rub on baby oil, olive oil or petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) into your baby’s scalp to help loosen the crust
✓ gently loosen the crust by using a soft bristled baby brush on baby’s scalp
✓ wash your baby’s hair and scalp gently with baby shampoo.

You may notice that some hair comes away with the flakes, this is normal. Your baby’s hair will grow back in time.

If these measures are not helping, you may also wish to speak to your local pharmacist about cradle cap treatments they recommend.

Don’t
× use any adult shampoo or soaps on baby’s scalp, use only baby products. Adult products may irritate the skin, or make it drier
× use any peanut based oils on baby’s scalp in case of an allergic reaction
× pick the crusts, as this could make the scalp sore and cause infection.
Talk to your GP if

- The cradle cap is all over your baby's body
- Your baby is uncomfortable, scratching or distressed
- The crusts leak fluid or bleed
- Areas around the cradle cap look red or swollen
- There's no improvement following a few weeks of treatment, or it appears to be getting worse.

Get an urgent same day GP appointment or go to your nearest Emergency (A&E) Department if

- Your baby is under 3 months of age and has a fever over 38 degrees C or is 3-6 months of age with a fever above 39 degrees C
- Your baby is feeding less than half of their usual feeds
- Your baby is passing less urine than usual (fewer than 3 wet nappies in 24 hours)
- Your baby seems very irritable and is not comforted by feeds or by paracetamol (if over 2 months of age).