

Seborrheic Dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis is a skin condition that primarily affects areas with many sebaceous glands, including the scalp, face, and chest. It causes fine, greasy scaling and/or redness and itching. In infants, it is commonly known as cradle cap, and appears as firm, greasy yellow scales on the scalp. While mild forms on the scalp are often referred to as dandruff, seborrheic dermatitis is distinct from dandruff due to its associated inflammation and potential to affect areas beyond the scalp.

The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed to involve a combination of genetic, environmental, and immune factors, including hormone levels, immunosuppression, family history, and even stress or lack of sleep. Additionally, overabundance of *Malassezia* yeast, a fungus normally present on the skin, plays a significant role.

Treatment for seborrheic dermatitis often starts with over-the-counter (OTC) shampoos. Examples include pyrithione zinc (Cerave Anti-Dandruff, Vanicream Anti-Dandruff, Head&Shoulders), selenium sulfide (Vichy Dercos Anti-Dandruff), or ketoconazole (Nizoral) shampoos. Patients should apply these medications 2-3 times weekly to affected areas, letting the medication rest for 5 min prior to rinsing off completely.

If symptoms continue after use of OTC shampoos, a dermatologist may prescribe shampoos such as a stronger ketoconazole or ciclopirox shampoo. These medications should be in the same way as OTC shampoos. These medications can also be used together with OTC shampoos, often one before the other, as they act in different ways.

There are also various topical medications including corticosteroids, anti-inflammatories and anti-fungal creams (such as ketoconazole cream and clotrimazole) that can be used in conjunction with the shampoos discussed above. These are especially useful for areas like the face or skin folds.

It is important to recognize that seborrheic dermatitis cannot be cured, but it is able to be improved or controlled with regular use of medications.

Speak with your dermatologist to learn more about treatment options.