CRADLE CAP

What Are Those Scales on My Newborn’s Scalp?

If you see yellowish, oily scales on your baby’s scalp, chances are it is cradle cap. Don’t be alarmed — it can usually be cleared up within a few weeks. Cradle cap is a buildup of dead skin cells that sometimes appears on a baby’s scalp in the first few weeks of life. Many parents worry that cradle cap is a result of something they did wrong, or that they are not washing their baby well enough, but this is usually not the case.

What should I do at home?

- Massage warm mineral oil or baby oil onto your baby’s scalp and use a soft-bristled brush to loosen the dead skin. Then shampoo the oil and scales away. Many parents worry that brushing or scrubbing the soft spot will hurt their baby, but this cannot happen with normal handling. Don’t be afraid to use firm pressure when brushing the scalp — it will help to loosen the dead skin that is causing the cradle cap.
- In more severe cases where the scales are thicker and more widespread, use an anti-dandruff shampoo after the mineral oil application. Since anti-dandruff shampoo can be irritating, use it only twice a week. Again, don’t be afraid to scrub your baby’s scalp vigorously.

Call your doctor or nurse practitioner if:

- The rash is very red and irritated
- The rash has spread beyond the scalp
- A raw, weeping rash is located behind the ears — this is common with cradle cap and is not dangerous, but may require another kind of medicine
- Cradle cap lasts more than two weeks despite treatment