

DANDRUFF

WHAT IT IS

Dandruff is harmless, but it can be embarrassing and inconvenient. It is basically flaking skin on the scalp that causes itching. Symptoms of this common complaint tend to worsen in dry winter conditions with lower humidity and may improve during the summer.

CAUSES

The most common underlying reason for dandruff is **dry skin** resulting from dry air. A frequent cause is **seborrheic dermatitis**, basically an oily scalp condition that may contain an abundance of yeast and leads to large white flakes or yellow scales from the uneven shedding and clumping of dead skin cells. Scalp **eczema** and **psoriasis** can also contribute to flaking and inflammation on the scalp that appear like dandruff, and cause patients' scalps to itch.

Dandruff can also stem from the overgrowth of a yeast (**malassezia**) that is found on healthy scalps. It feeds on oils produced by your scalp, and excessive levels can cause itching and flaking.

Babies can be affected by a form of dandruff called **cradle cap**. Seen most often in newborns and during infancy, this condition involves a yellow or white scaling scalp and some crusting. It is harmless, and generally resolves within the baby's first year.

Patients with darker skin tones are more likely to experience a more severe variant known as **petaloid seborrheic dermatitis**. It tends to occur around the scalp as a ring-shaped rash and may leave behind discoloration.



FACTS

- 1 An estimated 50% of North Americans have dandruff.
- 2 Dandruff is most common in younger people and usually resolves by middle age, although it can persist later in life.
- 3 More men have dandruff than women, possibly due to hormones that produce more active oil glands and an oilier scalp.
- 4 Medical conditions and certain medications can trigger or worsen dandruff and its variant seborrheic dermatitis.

TREATMENT

Shampooing more frequently is probably the most important method of dandruff control. This is because an oily scalp leads to accumulation and uneven shedding of dead skin cells, resulting in unsightly flakes. Depending on one's hair type, wetting the scalp daily with use of shampoo two to three times per week, or use of regular shampoo daily may be sufficient to treat mild cases of dandruff. If that doesn't work, there are several medicated dandruff treatment shampoos available over-the-counter.

Since medicinal ingredients vary from one product to another, you may have to experiment with different products, or rotate products to find out what works best for you and minimizes flaking.

Common medicinal ingredients used in shampoo for dandruff control include: coal tar, salicylic acid, selenium sulphide, zinc pyrithione, ketoconazole and ciclopirox olamine.

WHEN TO SEE A DERMATOLOGIST?

Dandruff can usually be effectively controlled with over-the-counter dandruff shampoos. However, if an itchy scalp persists despite using a dandruff-fighting shampoo for several weeks, or if you notice redness and swelling of the scalp, see a Certified Dermatologist for an assessment. You may need prescription-strength treatment.



Additional information on Dandruff is available online.

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