



NOTTINGHAM SUPPORT GROUP FOR CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH ECZEMA

In association with : Nottingham University Hospitals 
NHS Trust

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, Dr Ruth Murphy, Dr Jane Ravenscroft, Nurse Consultant Sandra Lawton and parents on behalf of the Nottingham Support Group for Carers of Children with Eczema.

Scalp Eczema - Information for Parents

Atopic eczema can occur anywhere on the body including the scalp and this is an area which does not always get the attention it may require. However, eczema in this area can be very itchy and is visible to all. Scalp eczema may appear as mild dryness, with fine scales like dandruff, right through to red inflamed areas with marked dryness or scabs from scratching. Secondary infection may also be a problem. Areas may be weepy and if there is constant rubbing and scratching there may be some hair loss which is not permanent.

Some children may have thick greasy scales especially as babies and this is often called cradle cap or sometimes known as infantile seborrhoeic dermatitis. Children who have a family history of eczema often present with a cradle cap type eczema. For these children the scalp is itchy which is not the case with infantile seborrhoeic dermatitis. For some children the scale may be thick and stuck to the hair and the term for this is pityriasis amiantacea: <http://www.dermnet.org.nz/scaly/pityriasis-amiantacea.html>.

Caring for Scalp Eczema

We advise not using any shampoos under one year of age. If your child has eczema and a cradle cap type scale on the scalp use an emollient product to soften the scale and wash the area. If you are using an emollient for washing the skin it can also be used to soften the scale in the scalp. Massage the cream or ointment into the scalp before you plan to bath your child. Allow it to soak in and then gently remove the scales by rubbing or brushing gently in a circular motion with a soft brush. This may need to be done a few times over several days to remove all the scale and then be part of your routine to keep on top of things.

Questions about scalp eczema

Q1 I have been advised to use olive oil on my babies head is this the best thing to use?

We do not recommend olive oil because it may irritate atopic skin. Olive oil contains oleic acid which can disrupt the skin barrier.

Q2 I have removed all the dry skin and scale but my son is still scratching his head. What should I use?

For scalp eczema, the treatment is similar to other body areas. Topical corticosteroids should be applied for 3-5 consecutive days to reduce inflammation. These are best applied as preparations specially designed for treating the scalp and they usually come in the form of gels, mousses or lotions. Your eczema team will give you further advice regarding these.

Q3 The scalp is looking very red and weepy, why is that?

A very red and weeping scalp may be caused by secondary infection. This may need a course of oral antibiotics.

Q4 My daughter is starting school soon and I am really worried about using head lice treatments in case they make her eczema worse?

In children, a very itchy scalp can also be a sign of head lice and they should be checked for head lice by wet combing with a nit comb and the emollient cream or ointment with which you generally wash your child's skin. Using conditioner may irritate their scalp. If you do find live head lice you can apply the emollient cream or ointment to the scalp either overnight within a shower cap or for a few hours prior to bathing. You then need to wash the hair with warm water and emollient and gently comb the hair wiping the comb on some kitchen towel. It will also make it easier to see the lice. The emollient ointment or cream will suffocate the head lice.

website - www.nottinghameczema.org.uk

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Some over the counter products do have the same effect of suffocating the head lice. Others are insecticide based and could irritate your child skin and may not be suitable if they also have asthma. Discuss this with your eczema/asthma team. Continue to use the emollient at least weekly to remove the eggs and detect small head lice. Any remaining scalp inflammation needs treatment with a corticosteroid scalp application.

Q5 Can I use a shampoo for my daughter now she is one and which one is best?

National guidance advises not to use a shampoo under one year of age. If using your emollient suits your daughter there is no need to change. If you feel you want to use a shampoo find one that claims to be suitable for eczema and when you use it try not to let it run onto the body in the bath or shower, as it may still dry and irritate the skin.

Q6 Is hair dyeing a problem for those with eczema?

Hair-dye products contain a wide range of chemicals and almost any of these could trigger sensitivity reactions. Local irritation will tend to affect the scalp, neck, forehead, ears and eyelids; generalised symptoms may include more widespread itching, urticaria (nettle rash), general unwellness or, rarely, anaphylaxis. In general non-permanent hair dyes cause less reactions than permanent ones, but are by no means a safe option. Vaseline around the hairline, neck and ears stops the dye staining and helps to protect the skin. For more information visit: http://www.allergyuk.org/fs_hairdye.aspx

For further advice please contact
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For advice on support issues please contact the NSGCCE via the website
www.nottinghameczema.org.uk and click on the contact icon  at the
top of most pages or email us at enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk

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