
Understanding Seborrheic Dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis is a common type of rash that causes red, scaly, greasy skin. It occurs on skin that has oil glands. These include the face, upper chest, and scalp, where it is often called dandruff. It tends to last a long time. Or go away and come back. Seborrheic dermatitis is not spread from person to person.

How to say it

seh-bor-EE-ik der-muh-TY-tis

What causes seborrheic dermatitis?

Experts don't know what causes it. It may be partly caused by a type of yeast that grows on skin, along with extra oil production. Experts are still learning more. It isn't caused by poor hygiene. It's more common in men than women, and it can occur at any age. It may be more severe in people with HIV/AIDS, Parkinson disease, alcoholism, or epilepsy. It can also get worse during times of stress.

Symptoms of seborrheic dermatitis

Symptoms can include skin that is:

- Bumpy
- Covered with yellow scales or crusts
- Cracked
- Greasy
- Itchy
- Leaking fluid
- Painful
- Red or orange

These symptoms can occur on skin:

- Around the nose
- Behind the ears
- In the beard
- In the eyebrows
- On the scalp, also known as dandruff
- On the upper chest and upper back
- Armpits

- Genitals

You may also have acne, inflamed eyelids (blepharitis), or other skin conditions at the same time.

Treatment for seborrheic dermatitis

Treatment can reduce symptoms for a period of time. You can talk to your healthcare provider about treatment choices. The types of treatments most often used include:

- **Antifungal shampoo, body wash, or cream.** These contain medicines, such as ketoconazole, fluconazole, selenium sulfide, ciclopirox, or pyrithione zinc.
- **Corticosteroid cream or ointment.** These contain medicines, such as hydrocortisone.
- **Calcineurin inhibitor cream or ointment.** These contain medicines, such as pimecrolimus or tacrolimus.
- **Shampoo or cream with other medicines.** These contain medicines, such as coal tar, salicylic acid, or zinc pyrithione.
- **Sodium sulfacetamide creams and washes.** These may also help.

In some cases, 1 treatment will stop working after a while. Switching between treatments every few months may be helpful.

Wash your skin gently. You can remove scales with oil and gentle rubbing or a brush.

Living with seborrheic dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis is an ongoing (chronic) condition. It can go away and then come back. You will likely need to use shampoo, cream, or ointment with medicine once or twice a week. This can help to keep symptoms from coming back or getting worse. Using petroleum jelly isn't recommended. It can make symptoms worse.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of the following occur:

- Symptoms that don't get better, or get worse
- New symptoms