Cradle cap, also called infantile seborrheic dermatitis, is common. In fact, roughly 70% of all newborn babies in the United States show some sign of cradle cap within their first three months of life. [1] According to the literature, seborrheic dermatitis has no cure.

And, as far as physicians can tell, a case of cradle cap is harmless and usually goes away by a baby’s first birthday.

If you ask friends, family, and even your pediatrician about the cause of cradle cap, you may get an assortment of answers. This is because no one really knows the cause of infantile seborrheic dermatitis.

What we do know is that cradle cap shows up in oily places, like the scalp and face, and that studies have found an association between cradle cap and a fungus called Malassezia.

The Fungus Behind Cradle Cap

Cradle cap in infants under three months of age doesn't have to be the norm. Giving your baby a few drops of fermented vegetable juice on her lips can populate her gut with healthy bacteria to result in healthy, clear skin!

Consider yourself healthy and normal if Malassezia has colonized your skin and scalp.

In fact, in the same way that Candida helps to contribute to a healthy ecosystem within the mouth and vaginal canal, Malassezia is a yeast that likewise contributes to a healthy ecosystem where it resides – namely, the skin.

One study found that Malassezia was passed from mother to child and that Malassezia colonizes 100% of newborn infants within their first day of life. [2]

Just like the walls of the digestive tract, the skin with all its nooks and crevices is home to a wide variety of microorganisms, yeast, and bacteria that are immensely beneficial to our wellbeing.

While Malassezia is not normally harmful, it is opportunistic. This means that under the right circumstances it can cause irritation and disease.

The Problem: An Environment Where Yeast Can Thrive

Infantile seborrheic dermatitis will generally disappear at some point during childhood. If it ever reappears during puberty (which is common) or during adulthood, it is simply called seborrheic dermatitis. According to the literature, seborrheic dermatitis has no cure. [3]

Seborrheic dermatitis is a lifelong condition because Malassezia is a part of normal skin ecology. So what is the real problem?

Just as in the case of Candida albicans, the problem is the environment that allows the yeast to proliferate and dominate. This is why studies have found a correlation between seborrheic dermatitis, oxidative stress, and compromised immune function. [4, 5]

There are many theories behind the development of cradle cap.
One theory says that cradle cap develops when newborn skin is overwhelmed with oil production. After all, cradle cap shows up in the oiliest of places, like the scalp and face, specifically where there are a large number of sebaceous glands. [6, 7]

As it turns out, the fungus Malassezia is lipophilic. This means that it likes and feeds on fats, saturated fats to be specific. This is why it tends to populate oily places on the body.

Another theory tells us that cradle cap is a result of fluctuations in hormones. These hormones, which belong to the mother, still circulate through the newborn's body and cause cradle cap. [8]

However, most often cradle cap is simply an overgrowth of the yeast, Malassezia. Both oily skin and a shift in hormone production support the proliferation of Malassezia. This is why antifungal medications often alleviate cases of infantile seborrheic dermatitis. [9, 10]

The problems associated with seborrheic dermatitis are beyond cosmetic. If your child develops cradle cap or if you ever had cradle cap as a child, it is a clue.

This clue tells you that for one reason or another, the microorganisms that populate the skin are imbalanced. [11] The reason may have to do with:

- Compromised immune function
- Endocrine disruption and hormonal imbalance
- Antibiotic use

An overgrowth of Candida or Malassezia should raise a red flag. This is because overgrowth can only happen when the environment allows it. An overgrowth of yeast indicates a deeper imbalance that must be addressed.

This is especially true in the case of a newborn baby.

The microbes that initially populate a baby's internal and external environment shape that baby's future. A newborn’s inner ecosystem sets the blueprint for his or her psychological and physical health. [12]

**Two Natural Ways to Alleviate Malassezia Overgrowth**

If your newborn suffers from cradle cap:

- Breastfeed if possible. Breast milk educates an infant's immune system and promotes a healthy immune response.
- A drop or two of juice from fermented vegetables on your baby’s lips will prompt healthy bacteria to colonize the digestive tract. A healthy gut supports healthy skin.

If you had cradle cap as a child or suffer from Malassezia overgrowth or dandruff as an adult, it is essential to support the body with probiotic-rich fermented foods and beverages. These foods give the body the beneficial microorganisms that it needs to manage opportunistic organisms, while also supporting healthy immune function.

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References:


