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Dandruff

Dandruff is the shedding of excessive amounts of dead skin flakes from the scalp. There may be a bit of itching, but no redness or scabbing. It usually gets worse during the fall and winter and improves in the summer. While it is caused by build up of dead skin, in many more severe cases a yeast-like germ aggravates it. While this germ is normally present on everyone's scalp, it can produce some irritation if it grows heavily.

Dandruff differs from a dry scalp in that it is improved when one shampoos more often. People who actually have a dry scalp are also dry all over their skin. Some people say their dandruff gets worse when they are stressed, anxious and tense. The best way to control dandruff is to use a shampoo that contains a medication, such as selenium sulfide (Selsun Blue) or zinc pyrithione (head & Shoulders, ZNP) or Nizoral AD. For more severe cases try tar (Ionil T, T/gel, Pentrax) or sulfur (Meted or Sebulex). For best results, buy 2 or 3 and alternate them. Since dandruff is a natural process, it can not be eliminated; it can only be controlled.

When scaling of the scalp is accompanied by redness, or when the redness and flaking spreads to cause greasy scaling on the face, eyebrows or sides of the nose, you may have seborrheic dermatitis. Severe dandruff and seborrheic dermatitis are really related conditions and can often be controlled by prescription medications.