Dear Alice,

I am suffering from an itchy and dry scalp. Is there like a shampoo or solution that I can use to reduce the dryness and irritation? At the same time, I don't want the shampoo to make me lose hair. God only knows how little I have left! Thank you very much for your help.

?Flaky

Answer

Dear Flaky,

An itchy, dry scalp is usually a sign of dandruff. Dandruff is a harmless and common, yet irritating, condition in which dead skin is shed from the scalp, leading to the production of those unsightly white flakes. The usual cause of dandruff is seborrheic dermatitis, a type of skin rash. However, several other causes of your discomfort may include: psoriasis, a skin disorder that comes with dry red skin and silvery scales; ringworm of the scalp, or *tinea capitis*; a fungal infection that may lead to red, itchy patches on the scalp and cause hair loss; or something more common, such as allergies or skin irritations from perfumes, hair products, or laundry detergent. The treatment for these conditions may vary from oral or topical medications to wet dressings and light therapy, or phototherapy, or simply refraining from using a certain product or toiletry.

Because of the large variation in the causes and treatments for your condition, a visit to your health care provider may get to the root of this head scratcher. Your provider may be able to help you, or may refer you to a dermatologist.

In the meantime, some things you may do to treat the itching and dryness include:

- **Scrapping the scratch.** This may be easier said than done, but scratching may make the area worse and cause further damage to your scalp. Keeping your fingernails trimmed and wearing gloves at night may help prevent you from scratching both when you are awake and asleep.
- **Cooling down.** Applying cool, wet compresses to your scalp may soothe the itchiness for a bit. As a bonus, the compress on your scalp will protect it from being scratched.
- **Getting soaked.** Oatmeal and baking soda are often used to soothe itchiness and dryness (as anyone who’s ever had chicken pox might remember!). Taking a bath and soaking your head in water with some uncooked oatmeal or baking soda sprinkled in
may help soothe the itch. If you find bathing with your food unappetizing, you may look for specially formulated bath products that have colloidal oatmeal in them instead.

- **Staying fragrance-free.** The dye or perfume in your shampoo, conditioner, or other hair products and toiletries may be the main cause of the skin irritation. You may try using fragrance-free and/or hypoallergenic labeled formulas and see if your condition improves. Make sure you rinse thoroughly after applying the products to help ensure that no residue stays behind, which may also contribute to the itchiness.

For more information on itchy, dry skin, check out the related Q&As below. Additionally, the Mayo Clinic [2] has an abundance of information and resources about itchy skin and skin conditions.

Alice!
Category:
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Related questions

Itchy legs? [6]
Dry skin and eczema help [7]
How often to wash hair? [8]
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Ringworm [10]
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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [12]
Medical Services (CUMC) [13]
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