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Seborrheic Dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis is a very common disorder of the skin. In its most simple form it is characterized by peeling and flaking of the scalp often referred to as dandruff. When out of control, it can lead to redness and scaling of the eyebrows, sides of the nose, ears, and central chest, in addition to the scalp.

The cause of seborrheic dermatitis is unknown, but may be in part due to an overgrowth on the skin of a micro-organism called *Pityrosporum orbiculare*. It is not contagious, has no allergic causes, and is not related to skin cancer. Seasonal changes and emotional factors have been known to aggravate the condition.

Seborrheic dermatitis is a chronic condition. This means that although it can be completely controlled, it cannot be cured outright. With the proper use of a medicated shampoo and a prescription lotion or cream, it should be manageable with professional medical supervision. In severe flare-ups, oral medications may be needed temporarily.

The most important thing to understand about treatment and control is the variability of the process. There are active phases when the shampoo may be necessary on a daily basis and inactive phases when weekly use of the shampoo will be adequate. The most active periods tend to be in the seasons approaching winter and in the early spring. Summer often brings a natural remission only to flare again in the fall. Stress also can play a significant contributory role.