

What is dandruff and how is it treated?

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Dandruff becomes more common in the cold winter months, when the chilly air and dry heat causes a person's scalp to flake and itch.

But while it might be an annoying and unattractive condition, dandruff doesn't mean you are an unclean person, the American Academy of

Dermatology (AAD) says.

"It is a common misconception that dandruff is caused by poor hygiene," Dr. Mona Sadeghpour, a board-certified dermatologist in Pittsburgh, Pa. and Lone Tree, Colo., said in an academy news release. "Causes range from oily skin to hair care habits, along with some [medical conditions](#)."

Luckily, there are a number of effective treatments available for dandruff, the AAD says.

Many folks can treat mild dandruff at home by regularly washing their hair, experts say.

Folks with a more persistent case of dandruff might turn to a [shampoo](#) specially formulated to treat the condition.

Effective dandruff shampoos should contain at least one of these ingredients, the AAD says, Zinc pyrithione, [salicylic acid](#), sulfur, selenium sulfide, ketoconazole, or [coal tar](#).

If one shampoo doesn't work, you should try alternating between shampoos containing different active ingredients, the AAD recommends.

Some dandruff shampoos need to sit on your scalp for about 5 to 10 minutes before rinsing, the AAD says. Check the instructions on the bottle.

People also can better treat dandruff by shampooing according to their hair type.

For example, folks with fine or naturally straight hair, or an oily scalp, should wash their hair often. They might need to shampoo either daily or

every other day, and use a dandruff shampoo twice a week.

Those with coarse or naturally [curly hair](#) should shampoo when needed, using their dandruff shampoo once a week. These folks should try to work dandruff shampoo into their scalp rather than their hair, as ingredients that treat dandruff tend to dry out hair.

People using dandruff shampoos also should protect their scalp from the sun. A scalp sunburn can increase dandruff flaking, and some products, such as those containing coal tar, can make the scalp more sensitive to harmful UV rays.

Folks can protect their [scalp](#) by wearing a hat or using sunscreen if they have thinning hair.

"If these tips do not provide you relief from dandruff, it is best to make an appointment to see a board-certified dermatologist," Sadeghpour said.

More information: The American Academy of Dermatology has more about [treating dandruff](#).

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