Common, dry, scaly scalp conditions

The skin is a complex organ made up of several layers of different types of cells which are continuously being renewed. The renewal process normally takes 3 to 4 weeks, but in some scaly scalp conditions it can be as little as 3 days.

Dandruff
When the renewal cycle operates too quickly, cells on the outer layers do not separate properly but remain together and are then shed as visible flakes. Dandruff is a scalp problem which is not related to hair type and is characterised by the shedding of dry skin flakes from an otherwise apparently normal scalp. Dandruff is a common scalp condition and affects up to 50% of the adult population at some time in their life.

Seborrhoeic eczema and cradle cap
Eczema on the scalp can result in a dry, scaly scalp. It commonly occurs as seborrhoeic eczema/dermatitis, a condition which is distinguished by the presence of scales or flakes of skin. Cradle cap, which occurs in babies, is similar but here thick, greasy, yellowish scales remain attached to the scalp.

Scalp psoriasis
Psoriasis is also common, affecting 2-3% of the population and can involve the scalp. Unlike other scaly scalp conditions, psoriasis is rarely itchy. It appears as red patches of skin covered with silvery scales, and is often thick with dense scale, particularly at the hairline.

The appearance of dry and scaly scalp

These different forms of dry scaly scalp conditions can be recognised from diagnostic signs such as flakes of skin in the hair, pink and itchy areas of the scalp or dense scaling on the scalp. However, the causes of dandruff, eczema, and psoriasis are still unknown.

There may be an alteration in the normal functioning of the skin which, while usually not serious, can give rise to some of these unpleasant symptoms.

Malassezia furfur (also known as Pityrosporum ovale or P. ovale) is a type of yeast, which is naturally present on the scalp. In dandruff and seborrhoeic scalp conditions, the yeast can significantly increase in number, which can make the condition worse. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist might recommend a shampoo active against this microorganism.

Self help tips for dealing with a dry scaly scalp

• Use a special shampoo regularly
• Massage your scalp when shampooing and try not to scratch it
• Avoid using (or keep to a minimum) cosmetic preparations such as hair mousse, tints or colourings
• Don’t hesitate to ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice

Useful contacts
If you suffer from seborrhoeic eczema or scalp psoriasis, the addresses of the following self help groups may be of interest.

National Eczema Society
Hill House, Highgate Hill London N19 5NA, UK.
www.eczema.org
Helpline: (8am-8pm Mon-Fri) 0870 241 3604

The Psoriasis Association
Milton House, 7 Milton Street
Northampton NN2 7JG, UK.
Telephone: 0845 676 0076
www.psoriasis-association.org.uk
How to get the best results from your shampoo

To get the best results from your shampoo follow these guidelines:

• Wet hair thoroughly with warm water
• Apply the shampoo then massage shampoo into hair and scalp
• Remove excess lather from hair with hands. Removing as much lather as possible is important as the lather holds the dirt and dead scale. If you rinse without removing the foam, the dead scale falls back onto the scalp and white debris will be visible once the hair is dry.
• Rinse with warm water
• Repeat application
• Remove as much lather as possible
• Finally rinse thoroughly, preferably under warm running water

1. Wet the hair and scalp with water.
2. Apply shampoo.
3. Apply shampoo to the hair and scalp and massage thoroughly with the fingertips.
4. Remove the excess lather from the hair with your hands.
5. - and then rinse with warm water.
6. Repeat the application.
7. - and massage to produce a rich lather.
8. Remove as much lather as possible with the hands.
9. Finally rinse thoroughly, preferably under warm running water.