

### **Definition**

Dandruff is the common name for a mild form of seborrheic dermatitis of unknown cause. It is a natural and harmless scalp condition in which the shedding of dead skin cells occurs at an unusually fast rate. Because of the oily skin often associated with this condition, these cells clump together and flake off as dandruff.

### **Description**

Dandruff is very common. Up to one-third of the U.S. population is affected by this condition. While it is not considered a disease, dandruff is a cosmetic concern for many people.

The following problems tend to exacerbate dandruff:

cold weather

dry indoor heating

stress (physical or emotional)

food allergies

nutritional deficiencies (B-complex vitamins or omega-3 fatty acids)

use of hair spray and gels

use of hair-coloring chemicals

use of electric hair curlers or blow dryers

### **Causes & Symptoms**

Dandruff is caused by an overgrowth of skin cells that make up the scalp. It is not known what accelerates this cell growth. However, scientists have suggested that dandruff may be a hypersensitive reaction to the proliferation of *Pityrosporum ovale*, a yeast that occurs naturally on the scalp. Another theory that held for some time linked dandruff to a fungus. A 2002 report said that scientists had identified new fungi of the *Malassezia* that seem to exist in overabundance on the scalps of those affected with the disease.

### **Prevention**

Preventive measures include regular hair washing, reducing stress, eating healthy foods and increasing humidity inside the house. In addition, excessive use of hair curlers, hair sprays and gels, and frequent hair coloring should be avoided. These tend to irritate the scalp and may worsen dandruff.