

Swollen Scalp (Caput Succedaneum and Cephalohematoma)

Some babies are born with swelling or a large bump on the scalp. Caput succedaneum is swelling under the skin of the scalp, while cephalohematoma results from bleeding under the scalp. Both conditions are related to pressure on the baby's head during birth. They are usually harmless.

What are caput succedaneum and cephalohematoma, and what do they look like?

Caput succedaneum.

- Swelling (edema) of the scalp. The swelling is caused by pressure on the head during delivery. Sometimes there is bruising, but the swelling is not from blood in the scalp.
- There may be swelling and bruising of the face, if your baby was born face first.
- Swelling goes down after a few days. When it does, you may notice “molding,” a pointed appearance of your baby's head that wasn't obvious before.
- The skull of infants is made up of pieces of bone that eventually fuse and become one. The places where the pieces meet are called “sutures.”
- If high pressure is placed on the skull, the pieces of bone may overlap at the sutures. This causes the baby's head to have an unusual, often pointed, appearance. This is called “molding,” and it may take several weeks to clear up.

Cephalohematoma.

- This is a collection of blood from broken blood vessels that builds up under the scalp. It is not in the brain.
- A lump or bump on one side of your infant's head. It is usually located toward the back or side of the head.
- The lump is usually caused by pressure on the skull during delivery or by the use of forceps to aid in delivery. Often, there is no bruising.
- The lump usually appears after several hours, or the day after birth. It may take several weeks or even a few months for the lump to go away.

What are some possible complications of swollen scalp?

With caput succedaneum, complications are rare.

With cephalohematoma, complications occur occasionally:

- Skull fracture may occur. These fractures usually heal without problems.
- If the collection of blood is large, it may result in anemia (low hemoglobin).
- Large cephalohematomas may result in jaundice. This is a yellow color of the skin caused by excess bilirubin, a substance produced by breakdown of blood as the cephalohematoma is resolving.
- More serious complications, such as bleeding into the brain or injury to the brain from skull fracture, occur only rarely.
- Occasionally, calcium deposits develop in the area of the cephalohematoma. This may leave a hard bump that lasts for several months.

What puts your child at risk of swollen scalp?

Caput succedaneum and cephalohematoma are common side effects of birth. A difficult labor or the use of forceps during delivery may increase the risk.

How is swollen scalp treated?

Usually, no treatment is needed.

- *Caput succedaneum* clears up in a few days.
- *Cephalohematoma.* If the doctor suspects a skull fracture, x-rays or other tests may be done. Most fractures heal with no problem. Fractures that are sunken (depressed) may need additional treatment.
- Jaundice (yellow color of the skin) is usually a minor complication. If jaundice is severe enough, light therapy may be recommended.

Many babies with caput succedaneum or cephalohematoma have “molding,” resulting in a pointed or oblong

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appearance of the head. This is normal, although it may take several weeks to clear up. No treatment is needed.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- Swelling and/or bruising of your baby's scalp do not continue to improve after your baby goes home from the hospital.
- Jaundice (yellow color of the skin) appears.
- Your baby becomes irritable or fussy for no apparent reason.