My Seedling Looks Stressed — When Should I Actually Worry?

It’s tempting to start diagnosing the moment a young seedling shows anything unusual. Most of the time, though, the right move is just to wait.

In the first 1-2 weeks, seedlings go through all kinds of minor cosmetic quirks — a spot, a slight droop, an odd leaf edge, cotyledons yellowing and dying back — that resolve entirely on their own as the root system establishes. Jumping straight to a diagnosis (or worse, extra nutrients) at this stage usually causes more harm than the original “issue” ever would have.

Check these three things before worrying

- **Is the medium actually dry?** Overwatering is the single most common real issue at this stage — check before assuming anything else.
- **Is she getting consistent light?** Erratic light schedules stress seedlings more than almost anything else.
- **Is she under 2 weeks old?** If yes to all three, the best move is often just to give it time.

The cotyledon trap

Those first two small round leaves (cotyledons) are meant to yellow and die back once the plant’s true leaves take over doing the photosynthesis work — this is completely normal and gets mistaken for stress constantly.

Save the real troubleshooting energy for once she’s a bit further along. Nature usually handles the small stuff on its own in the first couple of weeks.

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