

# HEAD LICE

## What are head lice?

The head louse is an insect that lives and breeds on your head. Head lice feed themselves by biting your scalp. Having head lice (pediculosis) is common; as many as 6 – 12 million people worldwide get head lice each year.

## Who can get head lice?

Anyone who comes in close head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice can get head lice. Head lice are found more often among children between the ages of 3 – 10, and their families.

## How do I know if I have head lice?

Nits or Live lice are present in the hair. Some symptoms include:

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites.
- Irritability.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected.

## How do you get head lice?

- By close head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice. Contact is common during play at school and at home (slumber parties, sports activities, at camp, on a playground, etc.).
- By using hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, pillows or towels *recently* used by someone with head lice.

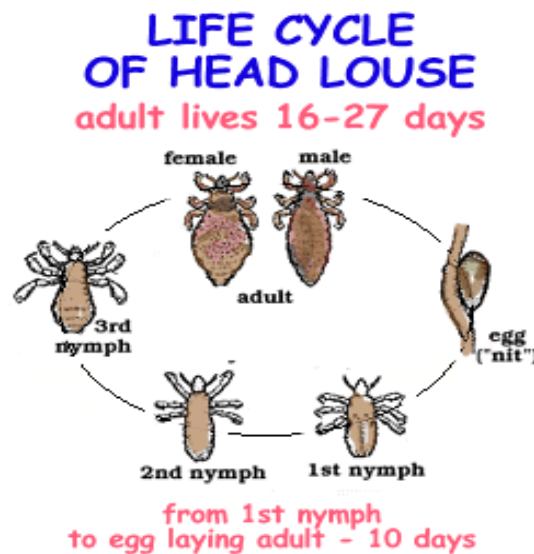
## What do they look like?

The insects are tiny, wingless, move quickly, and are difficult to see. They cannot jump or fly. They are 1 – 2 mm long and grayish brown in color. There are three forms of lice: the nit, the nymph and the adult.

**Nits:** Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about one week to hatch.

**Nymph:** The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about seven days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on blood.

**Adults:** The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. Females lay nits; they are usually larger than males. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If a louse falls off a person, it dies within two days.



# HEAD LICE

## How are head lice treated?

- There are many products available to treat head lice.
- Before buying any product, talk to your pharmacist.
- Talk to your doctor before treating:
  - Children under two years;
  - A person with a seizure disorder;
  - A person with a scalp infection.
- Buy a head lice shampoo or cream rinse from your drug store.
- Apply the product following instructions carefully. Misuse and overuse could be hazardous.
- Head lice products kill the head lice and many eggs, but one treatment may not kill all the eggs.
- Therefore, apply a second treatment 7 – 10 days after the first treatment to kill any newly hatched lice before they mature.
- It is suggested that you limit shampoo use between the two treatments and in the week following the second treatment. This may allow the head lice product to work more effectively.
- Check the head for live lice daily between treatments and remove any nits that are still present. Use a bright light to help you see. Carefully check all sections of the head and remove all the nits by using fingernails or a nit comb to drag each nit down the hair shaft.
- If live lice are found in the days following the first treatment, consult your pharmacist or Physician.
- There is conflicting information concerning whether or not *all nits* should be removed after the application of head lice products. **McLouth Policy** recommends the prudent removal of all nits. Removal of nits may minimize the hatching of eggs that were not killed and the spread of young hatched lice to other heads. It is also easier to notice a new infestation if all nits are removed. Recheck in 1 week for live lice and repeat treatment.



## What if a baby or a woman who is pregnant or breastfeeding has head lice?

Call your family doctor before choosing a treatment product. If you are pregnant and treating others, wear plastic or rubber gloves.

## Do I need to clean my house?

You must wash hats, scarves, hairbrushes, combs, or any other item that is worn or used on the head, as well as pillowcases, towels and bed linens after the first and second treatment in very hot soapy water. Temp of 130 degrees is recommended. Items that cannot be machine-washed should be dry cleaned or placed in an airtight bag for 10 days to two weeks. Pillows and stuffed animals can be placed into a hot dryer for at least 10-20 minutes. Heat has been proven effective in killing lice. Excessive house cleaning is not necessary, but it may be advisable to vacuum surfaces where heads have rested (e.g. sofas, seats of cars and helmets). NEVER use insecticide sprays.

# HEAD LICE

## How can I control the spread of head lice?

- Discourage head-to-head contact and sharing of hats, scarves, hairbrushes and combs.
- Tie long hair back in braids.
- Check the heads of all family members and people in close contact in case someone else has head lice.
- All family members with head lice should be treated at the same time.
- Tell all close contacts of the person with head lice to check their head. As well, tell the child's teacher and/or daycare worker.
- You cannot prevent head lice by using head lice shampoos or products – use them only if you have head lice.
- Check young school age children weekly for head lice; more often if there is an outbreak.

### Important points to remember

1. Be sensitive to your child's feelings!
2. Lack of cleanliness does not cause head lice.
3. Both children and adults can get head lice.
4. Short hair does not prevent the spread of lice.
5. Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals.

## What other methods can be used to treat head lice?

Olive oil: This kitchen staple is thought to be an excellent smothering agent. Lice supposedly suffocate and die when the ooze plugs their breathing holes, but it needs to be applied overnight under a shower cap because lice can survive without breathing for hours. You'll also have to comb to remove nits, but the olive oil should help loosen them from the hair shafts.

Cetaphil Gentle Skin Cleanser (8 oz for short hair, 12 oz for shoulder-length or longer hair)

Course of treatment consists of 3 applications done at one week intervals.

Pour 8 oz of Cetaphil into a condiment dispenser for easier application.

Step 1. Begin with dry hair. Apply the lotion to the entire scalp. Step 2. Use fingers to massage throughout scalp and hair.

Step 3. Repeat steps 1 & 2 to make sure entire head scalp, roots and hair tips have been thoroughly lotioned.

Step 4. Wait 2 minutes for lotion to act

Step 5. Comb out as much excess Cetaphil lotion as possible. The more you get out, the quicker blow drying will be.

Step 6. To comply with your schools "NO NITS POLICY" use a comb to carefully go through the entire scalp.

Step 7. Blow Dry the hair thoroughly, so that the scalp skin, hair roots and full length of the hair are totally dry.

Step 8. Style the hair with a sterilized comb and/or brush. Do not apply any styling gel, mousse, hair spray or other cosmetic products to the hair while the dried Cetaphil lotion is on the hair.

Step 9. Leave the dried lotion on the child's head for at least 8 hours, preferably overnight.

# HEAD LICE

Step 10. To remove the lotion at the end of the treatment phase, just shampoo with your usual shampoo, cream rinses etc.

## Coconut Oil and Apple Cider Vinegar Treatment

Step 1. Rinse your hair with vinegar; don't wash it out, leave it in until it dries. The vinegar dissolves the glue which sticks the eggs to your hair follicles.

Step 2. When the vinegar has dried, pour coconut oil into your hair, making sure you get complete coverage.

Step 3. Cover your hair with a shower cap or hair wrap and leave it in for several hours (over night is optimal), as it will take a few hours for the coconut oil to smother and kill the lice.

Step 4. Comb your hair with a lice comb to get all the eggs and lice out to comply with the "NO NITS POLICY"

Step 5. Shampoo your hair as normal.

Most people get results with one treatment and there are no chemicals. Oh and the coconut oil makes your hair beautiful and shiny, so you are getting a lush hair treatment at the same time!

Here are **8 common myths** and the corresponding **head lice facts**.

**Myth n°1: Head lice is a result of a poor hygiene and can be eliminated with soap and water.**

**Fact:** This myth is still deeply rooted in our society but it is really a myth. Head lice are resistant to water and soap. Having head lice is not a question of hygiene. They can infect anyone, whatever their background or personal hygiene

**Myth n°2: Lice jump or fly from one head to another.**

**Fact:** Head lice cannot fly because they have no wings. It can be dislodged from the head by air movement and thus give the appearance of flying. It cannot jump either.

**Myth n°3: All children with head lice scratch or itch.**

**Fact:** Initial head lice infestation may produce no signs or symptoms for 4 to 6 weeks. This means that your child can have head lice but will begin itching only about one month later.

**Myth n°4: Lice live in carpets, beds, clothes and couches.**

**Fact:** A louse can only live up to 48 hours away from a human scalp. It can live on a hair that has fallen on a bed or clothes but will die within 2 days if it cannot enter in contact with someone's head again.

**Myth n°5: It is necessary to clean the house because I can catch lice through belongings and home furnishings.**

**Fact:** Contamination happens only through direct contact with someone carrying head lice. Indirect transmission, such as through the exchange of hats, scarves, hairbands and helmets is perfectly possible, but actually quite uncommon statistically.

**Myth n°6: If my child is scratching his head it means he has head lice.**

**Fact:** the symptom of itching is not a proof that someone has head lice. You can diagnose head lice only if you can identify a living louse. Nits or eggs are often empty shells and do not allow an active infestation. Nits are often mistaken for dandruff, sand, dust or hair gel droplets.

**Myth n°7: Lice die immediately after treatment.**

**Fact:** It can take a live louse several hours (and up to 24 hours) before it dies following the treatment.

**Myth n°8: The whole family should always be treated.**

**Fact:** Only those who have a proven infestation should be treated, although all family members should be checked daily or weekly.

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