

# Head Lice

## Facts, Prevention, and Care



### Facts

- Lice feed on human blood. They need it to survive.
- Lice crawl from person to person and on to objects that touch the human head like hats, towels, scarves, brushes, pillows, etc. Lice cannot fly or jump.
- Lice do not care if you have dirty hair or squeaky clean hair. ANYONE can get head lice.
- Children in preschool and elementary school are most likely to get head lice.
- Lice are not known to spread disease, but they do make the head very itchy, and scratching can lead to infection.

### Prevention

- Teach your child not to share certain objects with others like hats, hair accessories, scarves, brushes, etc.
- If you know someone who has head lice, make sure you and your children do not come into contact with that person or their belongings.
- If your child's school reports a head lice infestation:
  - Make a habit of checking your child for head lice daily.
  - Inspect household items and clothes that your child has used. Look for lice and their eggs.
- Machine wash and dry:
  - Clothing, bed linens, and other items that an infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment
  - Use the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay.
- Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

# Diagnosing Head Lice at Home

You will need a bright light and a lice comb.

**The American Academy of Dermatology** says you can find head lice by following these 3 steps:

1. Wet the hair of the affected child or adult, if possible. Some people think it's easier to see the lice when the hair is wet. This also prevents the lice from scurrying away.
2. Sit the affected child or adult under a bright light.
3. Separate hair into sections. Beginning at the scalp, slowly comb outward through the hair section by section.

*As you comb through the hair, look closely at the hair behind the ears and around the nape of the neck. These are likely places to find lice and nits.*

- **Adult lice:** These look like one or more light-brown objects that resemble sesame seeds, often moving quickly. You can find these on the scalp or the hair.
- **Eggs:** These are yellow, brown, or tan objects that look like tiny seeds and appear to be cemented to individual hairs close to the scalp. If an egg has hatched, the seed-like object will be clear.

**Remember, there could be dandruff, lint, etc. in hair. If you find lice or eggs it will look like this:**



**LICE**



**EGGS (nits)**

# Treating Head Lice

You can buy products at your local drug or grocery store to treat head lice.

The CDC says to follow these guidelines during treatment:

1. Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
2. Apply lice medicine according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.



**WARNING: Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed.**

3. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
4. If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
5. If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
6. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.



7. After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.
8. Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Retreatment with lindane shampoo is not recommended.

## Natural Olive Oil Treatment

1. Cover the entire head with olive oil, massaging it into the scalp.
2. Put plastic wrap around the head, so that no air is able to get through. The oil will suffocate the lice.
3. After about two hours, wash the hair with mild shampoo, rinse well, and brush the hair with a lice comb. Sometimes you may have to repeat the shampoo a few times to remove all the oil.
4. Keep track of the days you do treatments. You will have to redo the treatment periodically. Redo the treatment on the following days: 1, 2, 5, 9, 13, 17, and 21. **DO NOT SKIP ANY DAY. You can do the treatment more often if you'd like, but do not miss any of these days.** These days are most efficient for killing lice.

## Vinegar Treatment to Remove Nits

Olive oil has not been proven to remove nits (lice eggs). To remove nits, use vinegar. Vinegar will NOT remove adult head lice, but it will help remove nits by removing their ability to stick to hair. Use the following treatment in order to remove nits:

**WARNING:** If your head is already irritated, using vinegar may worsen the problem.

1. Apply vinegar to all of the hair, especially close the scalp, behind the ears, and the neck area.
2. Wait a few minutes, then rinse off the vinegar with water or a combination of 50% water and 50% vinegar.
3. Use a nit comb to brush the nits from the hair. ***You have to comb in order to remove the nits. The vinegar will not do it by itself.***
4. Repeat the treatment each day until all the nits are gone.

## Treating your home

After someone in your home has had head lice, you must treat everything that his/her head has come into contact with.

- Place all items that touched the person's head during the past 2 days in a washing machine and wash in hot water.
- Dry all machine-washed items in a hot dryer, using the hottest setting. Dry for at least 10 minutes.
- For anything that cannot be machine washed, place them in the dryer at the hottest setting for 20 to 30 minutes.

### FINAL TIPS

- Use a lice comb instead of a normal comb when treating.
- Check family and friends for lice. Lice could have spread, so it is important to check others. Do not treat people who are not known to have lice.
- If the at-home treatment does not get rid of head lice, see a dermatologist for treatment.
- If you have used any family brushes to treat the lice, you should throw those away and get new ones.