

HEAD LICE

Would ALL parents please check their child's head regularly and if they find head lice please treat as soon as possible.

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects roughly 2-4mm long. They move fast and can be difficult to see. The females lay eggs every day. Each egg, about the size of a pinhead, is firmly attached to a hair close to the scalp. They take 7 days to hatch and then live for about a month. Head lice move from person to person during head to head contact only.

Head lice live on just a little blood which they get by biting the scalp. Their bites leave tiny red spots (another tell-tale sign of head lice) and these can itch intensely but usually only after lice have been present for several weeks.

If you already have these unwelcome visitors, the first step is to get an effective treatment which will kill the lice, and to treat ALL THE FAMILY WITH IT, using the wet combing method or medicated lotions.

Wet-combing method

There is a cost free way of keeping on top of head lice. When washing your child's hair, use a good dollop of conditioner and comb through using a nit comb.

No medicated products are necessary for wet combing. This can be beneficial because head lice are becoming more resistant to the insecticides that are commonly used to remove them.

However, the success of the wet-combing method depends on adopting a painstaking approach that involves regular and thorough combing.

1. Wash the hair using ordinary shampoo and apply ample conditioner, before using a wide-toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
2. Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb. Make sure that the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots with the bevel-edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
3. Draw the comb down to the ends of the hair with every stroke and check the comb for lice.
4. Remove lice by wiping or rinsing the comb.
5. Work methodically through the hair section by section so that the whole head of hair is combed through.
6. Rinse out the conditioner and repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair.
7. Repeat the procedure on day five, nine and 13 in order to clear the young lice as they hatch, before they have time to reach maturity.

The time that it will take to comb your child's hair will depend on the type of hair that they have and its length. For example, short, straight hair can be quickly prepared and can be fine-toothed combed in a few minutes, whereas longer, curlier hair will take longer to comb.

Medicated lotion or spray

Medicated lotion or spray is an alternative method for treating head lice. However, no medicated treatment is 100% effective. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend an over-the-counter lotion or spray. Medicated treatments should only be used if a living (moving) head louse is found.

Make sure that you have enough lotion to treat everyone in your family who is affected by head lice. Follow the instructions that come with the medicated lotion or spray when applying it.

The normal advice is to treat once, then repeat after seven days. Some medicated products also supply a comb for removing dead lice and eggs. Some medicated products may be capable of killing eggs as well as lice, although there is no certainty of this. Check for baby lice hatching from eggs three to five days after you use a product, and again 10 to 12 days afterwards.

A minimum of two applications of lotion are needed to kill the lice over the hatching period because the lotions do not always kill louse eggs.

If the lice appear to be unaffected by the product (some lice may have developed resistance to a particular insecticide) or if the problem persists, seek advice from your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or GP.

Cautions

Always seek advice from a healthcare professional before using medicated head lice lotions on the following groups:

- young babies (under six months old)
- pregnant women
- people with asthma or allergies

Always read the instructions carefully before using medicated head lice lotions.

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Home Remedies

Tea tree essential oil is a natural insecticide, making it an effective treatment for head lice.

1. Mix together one teaspoon of tea tree oil, one ounce of natural shampoo and three tablespoons of coconut or olive oil.
2. Apply the solution gently throughout your hair and cover your head with a shower cap or towel. Leave your head covered for a half an hour and then rinse thoroughly with hot water.
3. Finally, comb through your hair while it is still wet to remove the dead lice.

Note: Do not apply tea tree oil directly to the scalp.