

AS Facer (Longton) Ltd
66 Liverpool Road
Longton
Preston PR4 5PB
Tel: 01772 613 286



Head Lice

Definition

Head lice are tiny, wingless, parasitic insects that live and feed on blood from the scalp.

Description

Head lice are tiny greyish brown insects, about the size of a sesame seed. Head lice cling to hairs, close to the scalp which they feed off. Head lice lay eggs which hatch after 7 to 10 days. It takes about 10 days for a newly hatched louse to grow to an adult and start to lay eggs.

Nits are the empty white egg shells which are left when the Head lice hatch. Nits look like dandruff, but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, nits cannot be easily brushed out.

Head Lice are spread from close hair-to-hair contact. Head Lice do not jump or fly (they crawl) and generally cannot survive longer than 24 hours off the host. Head lice soon die when away from hair, and do not live in clothes and bedding, etc.

Signs and symptoms

Lice feed on human blood and spill their saliva onto the hair and into the scalp. The patient then develops an allergic reaction to the saliva, which causes itching and discomfort. In cases where the head lice have been detected early, the above process may not have yet occurred and itching may not be present.

Treatment options

A Doctor's consultation is usually not necessary unless the scalp becomes infected or the dermatitis is severe. Your Pharmacist is able to help you with Head lice treatment as most products are available over-the-counter.

Dimeticone lotion

Dimeticone has recently been found to clear head lice. It is a silicone-based product and is not classed as an insecticide chemical. Dimeticone has a good safety record and is widely used in cosmetics and toiletries. Dimeticone is applied in a similar way to insecticide lotions as described earlier. As with insecticide lotions, you need to apply the same lotion twice - 7 days apart. Each application is left on for at least 8 hours (overnight) and then washed off. Dimeticone works by coating the lice and suffocating them.

Dimeticone is not thought to kill unhatched eggs, which is why two applications are needed, 7 days

Suggested solutions

General

- » Head lice treatment
- » Fine toothed comb

Natural

- » Tea tree oil (applied externally)

apart. (The second application makes sure that any lice that hatch from eggs which survived the first application will be killed before they are old enough to lay further eggs.) Dimeticone is a relatively new treatment. More studies will be required to confirm its efficacy.

Insecticide lotion

Treatment with insecticide lotions has been used for many years. Research studies show that lice can be cleared in about 8 in 10 cases by using an insecticide lotion. You can buy an insecticide lotion from pharmacies. There are various brands. The active ingredient is usually malathion or phenothrin. Shampoo, mousse and creme rinse preparations of these insecticides are not recommended as they do not work as well as lotions. Re-apply the same lotion after seven days. Although lice are usually killed by one application, not all eggs may be.

Most Head lice lotions are very flammable. When you or your child have lotion on your hair, keep well away from fires, candles, gas cookers, pilot lights, matches and cigarette lighters

DETECTION AND TREATMENT

Using the Conditioner and Wet Combing Technique is the best method of detecting Head Lice and can also be helpful in treating mild cases. For the Conditioner and Combing Technique you will need :

- * Ordinary hair conditioner
- * An ordinary and fine toothed comb
- * Hair clips
- * Good light
- * Magnifying glass
- * A waterproof cape

CONDITIONER AND WET COMBING TECHNIQUE

- 1) Wash the hair as normal.
- 2) Rinse and apply lots of normal conditioner over the scalp and hair from root to tips.
- 3) Use the ordinary comb to detangle the hair.
- 4) Switch to the detection comb. You may find it easier to divide long hair into sections with hair clips.
- 5) Rinse the comb after each stroke. In good light, check for Head Lice and eggs. Adult lice are easier to see - young lice can be difficult to detect. Using a magnifying glass will help you detect smaller lice.
- 6) Comb each section twice until you have combed the whole head. If the comb becomes clogged, rinse to remove the Head Lice or eggs.
- 7) Keep combing until all the conditioner is removed from the hair.
- 8) Repeat the Conditioner and Combing Technique four times spaced over 2 weeks (approximately every 3 days) and continue until no Head Lice are found for 3 consecutive sessions.

WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK

Some cases of Head lice are very persistent. Reasons why treatment may not be effective include;

- Inadequate application of the product
- Lice are resistant to insecticide
- Failure to retreat to kill eggs
- Reinfection

Pharmacist's advice

Ask your Pharmacist for advice.

- 1) See the Conditioner and Wet Combing Technique under the Health Management section in this topic.
- 2) Use a **Head Lice treatment** to kill Head Lice. Ask your Pharmacist for a suitable brand and how to use it. Repeat the treatment after 7 days.
- 3) Lice are often resistance to some over-the-counter treatments. If the first attempt at treatment is unsuccessful, ask your Pharmacist for another brand with different active ingredients and repeat the process.
- 4) Head Lice treatment kills the adult lice but will not remove nits (empty egg cases). Use a special **fine-toothed comb**, from your Pharmacy, to remove nits after treatment.
- 5) Ask your Pharmacist about chemical-free headlice treatments.
- 6) There are also a number of herbal treatments available, such as Tea tree oil, that may help to manage Head lice. Ask your Pharmacist for advice.

DISCLAIMER : This information is an educational aid only. It is not intended to replace medical advice for individual conditions or treatments. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or naturopath before following any medical regimen to see whether it is safe and effective for you.