

hours when away from a human host, and the life span of the average female is 1 month. The female lays her eggs at night at the junction of a hair shaft and close to the skin because the eggs need a warm environment. The nits, or eggs, hatch in approximately 7 to 10 days.

Clinical Manifestations and Diagnostic Evaluation

Itching, caused by the crawling insect and insect saliva on the skin, is usually the only symptom. Common sites of involvement are the occipital area, behind the ears, and at the nape of the neck.

Observation of the white eggs (nits) firmly attached to the hair shafts confirms the diagnosis. Because of their brief life span and mobility, adult lice are difficult to locate. Nits must be differentiated from dandruff, lint, hair spray, and other items of similar size and shape. On inspection, nits are seen attached to the hair shaft. Scratch marks and/or inflammatory papules caused by secondary infection may be found on the scalp in the vulnerable areas (Fig. 6-14).



FIG 6-14 Pediculosis capitis. (From Habif TP, Campbell JL, Chapman MS, et al: *Skin disease: diagnosis and treatment*, ed 2, St Louis, 2005, Mosby.)

Therapeutic Management

Treatment consists of the application of pediculicides and manual removal of nit cases. Because of its efficacy and lack of toxicity, the