

Head lice and nits

Head lice and nits are very common in young children. They live in clean and unwashed hair and are usually spread through head-to-head contact.

Symptoms

Head lice can make your head feel:

- itchy
- like something is moving in your hair

The only way to be sure someone has head lice is by finding live lice or eggs. Nits are empty eggs left behind when lice hatch. They are attached to the hair near the scalp.

Lice and nits can be difficult to spot in the hair.



Head lice are small insects up to 3 millimetres long;



Nits can be yellow, brown or white

Treating head lice

Treat head lice as soon as you spot them. You do not need to see your GP.

Check everyone in the home and treat them on the same day if they have head lice.

There's no need for children to stay off school if they have head lice.

Wet combing

You can remove lice and nits by wet combing. Try this before anything else. You can buy a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb) online or from pharmacies to remove head lice and nits.



Remove head lice and nits by wet combing

Follow the instructions on the pack, but generally you:

- use the comb on wet or dry hair – but it usually works best on wet hair with conditioner
- comb the whole head of hair from the roots to the ends
- repeat every few days for 2 weeks

Medicated lotions and sprays

Ask a pharmacist for advice if you've tried wet combing for 2 weeks, but your child still has head lice.

They may recommend using medicated lotions and sprays. These kill head lice and you can buy them from pharmacies, supermarkets or online.

Check the pack to see if the product is safe for you or your child. Talk to your GP, midwife or obstetrician first if you or someone in your family is pregnant.

There are instructions in the box on how to use the treatment.

Head lice should die within a day after treatment. Lotions and sprays come with a comb to remove dead lice and eggs.

You may need to repeat some treatments after a week to kill any newly hatched lice.

If lotions or sprays do not work, speak to a pharmacist about other treatments.

Preventing head lice

You cannot prevent head lice. You can reduce the risk of lice spreading by avoiding head-to-head contact and tying back long hair.

Do not use medicated lotions and sprays to prevent head lice. These can irritate your scalp.

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