

Checking for Head Lice

It's advisable to use a detector comb on all members of your family at least **once a week**, especially if you have school-age children.

- Choose a comfortable, well-lit area and use a specially designed fine toothed plastic detection comb.
- Hair can either be dry or wet (use water or conditioner). Comb through the hair with an ordinary comb to get rid of any tangles.
- You may find a magnifying glass helpful to check that what you have found is an insect rather than a flake of skin or dirt.
- If you are using conditioner the comb may need rinsing during checking.
- After use, wash the comb with clean soapy water and then thoroughly rinse and dry before storing in a dry place.
- Treatment should only be undertaken if live lice are found. If nits, but no lice are found after thorough checking then these are likely to be from an old infection which is no longer current and treatment is not necessary.



Divide the hair into sections.

Gently insert the detection comb at the bottom of a section of hair with the comb almost parallel with the scalp so that the specially designed rounded ends of its teeth will glide over the scalp without scratching.



Comb lightly outwards for the whole length of the hair.



After each stroke wipe the comb with a tissue and examine any debris found.



Repeat this process over the whole scalp paying particular attention to the areas behind the ears, at the back of the neck and under the fringe.

Hedrin

Information supplied by Hedrin 4% Lotion head lice treatment. Contains Dimeticone. Always read the label.

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1. Thomas, D.R., McCannell, L., Roberts, R. et al. (2006) Surveillance of insecticide resistance in head lice using biochemical and molecular methods. Archives of Diseases in Childhood 91(9), 777-778.



About Head Lice!

Are head lice a common problem?

Yes they are. We don't know exactly how many people in Britain have head lice, but a survey in Wales suggested the figure could be as high as 10%. Anyone can catch them, but lice are most common amongst children between the ages of 4 - 11, and especially amongst girls.

Does head lice infection mean that you have dirty hair or a dirty home?

Absolutely not. Head lice don't mind if hair is clean or dirty, and as they cannot live away from the human head, home hygiene has nothing to do with infection.

Do pets spread head lice?

No. Head lice are a purely human parasite and cannot infect cats, dogs or other animals.

How are lice spread?

By close head-to-head contact. Lice will not survive on clothing, hats, headphones, hairbrushes or furniture.

Don't they jump from head to head?

No. Lice don't have wings or the right sort of legs for jumping. They only move directly from one person's hair to hair on another head. Sometimes when you are combing or brushing the hair, the electrostatic charge can make lice appear to leap away from the head.

Will very short hair discourage lice?

No. Lice will happily live in 1 cm of hair; the only advantage of short hair is that detection and treatment can be easier.



How do I know whether anyone has head lice?

By finding a living adult louse - a **fine tooth plastic detection comb** is best for finding them (see over for tips on checking for lice).

What about nits?

Lice lay their eggs very close to the scalp and glue them to the hair. **Nits are empty or dead egg cases** and they are easier to spot as the hair grows. They are a good indicator that lice are about, but not proof that someone is currently infected. The only way to remove empty egg cases is to physically pull or comb them off the hair.



Head louse eggs (nits) on hair

What do lice look like?

Young lice are the size of a **full stop**. Adult lice are the size of a **sesame seed** and the females live for about a month, laying 4 - 6 eggs a day.



Close-up of head lice, *Pediculus capitis*

I've found a live louse, what do I do?

Don't panic! Check everybody in the family with a detector comb and treat the people who have living lice in their hair. Your local pharmacist can advise you on a suitable treatment.

