

Hair facts

E D E N

H A I R G R O U P

ESSENTIAL INFO FROM EDEN

Fact-sheet 1: Head lice

1) What are head lice?

Head **lice** are very small insects which live on the scalp of human beings. They are few millimetres in length and are a light brown colour. They don't live on animals. The lice feed by sucking blood from your scalp. Lice can live for up to 24 hours off the scalp.

They lay eggs, called **nits**, which they stick to the shafts of your hair with a very strong glue. The **live eggs** are dull grey, and are fastened to the hair very close to the scalp, so they are kept nice and warm. After about 7 days, the eggs hatch, and new lice are released. 9 to 10 days later, the new lice are fully grown, and start laying eggs. Very soon hundreds of lice can be living on your scalp.

Hatched eggs remain attached to your hair for some time and are harmless. The hatched egg is white, and can be seen as a small white blob stuck to a hair, about an inch away from the scalp. It is much easier to see than the unhatched grey egg. Lice live on long hair, short hair, dirty hair and on very clean hair. Lice are not fussy.

3) What are the symptoms?

The main symptom of head lice is terrible itching of the scalp. Children are more bothered with itching than adults. Infected children will scratch their heads vigorously, and will often scratch during their sleep. Some infected adults hardly itch at all. The lice are small, dull brown in colour, and move very quickly. It is very hard to see them and almost impossible to catch them.

2) How can I find out if I have lice / nits?

Here are three ways of finding out if you have head lice.

1. By using very fine tooth comb you may be able to comb dead lice and nits out of your hair. You can buy a special **nit comb** from the pharmacy. If you comb your hair over a piece of white paper, any nits or lice will be easier to spot.

2. A better way to find head lice is to comb your hair while it is wet. You will need to use a special nit comb. Wash your hair in the usual way and apply plenty of hair conditioner. Comb your hair while still wet and before you wash the conditioner off. Keep checking the comb for lice. The conditioner makes your hair slippery, and the lice find it hard to escape from the comb.

3. Another way to check your hair for lice is to look for the old eggs (or nits). The hatched nit eggs can be seen fairly easily (they are white) You will need to get someone else to check your hair for you. The nits are very small (smaller than a pin head), and will be firmly stuck to the hairs, about an inch or two away from the scalp. They can be mistaken for dandruff, but you can't brush them away because they are firmly stuck to the hair.

Lice do not jump.
You can only catch lice with
close contact or touching heads.
Keep long hair
tied / plaited up at school

4) What is the treatment?

There are two ways to get rid of head lice.

1. Using chemicals:

You can buy a variety of lice killing lotions or shampoos from the pharmacist. However, we **strongly recommend** you use the wet-combing method instead of using these chemical lotions. Some common treatments used in the UK are - Derbac-M, Prioderm, Quellada-M, Sulleo-M, Lyclear and Full Marks. Ask the pharmacist for advice if you need treatment for;

- young babies (under 6 months)
- pregnant women
- people with asthma

...and always **read the instructions** carefully.

Unfortunately, these chemicals don't always work. Lice can become resistant to these treatments. The repeated use of these chemicals may be harmful to health.

2. "Wet combing" method

This method is very safe. It is cheap, and works well. All you need is a large bottle of hair conditioner, a nit comb, and some time and patience. (It is best to ask someone to help you.)

1. Wash your hair with your usual shampoo
2. While your hair is wet, apply plenty of hair conditioner
3. Comb your hair using a fine **nit comb**;
 - comb from the roots upwards
 - check the comb for lice, and clear them away, after each sweep
 - comb all your hair, a little at a time, carefully
4. Repeat this **every 3 days for 2 weeks** to get rid of any newly hatched lice

Remember to check everyone in the family for lice and nits, using the methods described above. With a little time and effort, you can get rid of lice safely, cheaply, and without using any chemicals.