



Head Lice (Nits)

You have been given this leaflet because you have asked for head lice treatment that you can get “over the counter” (OTC) from pharmacies, supermarkets and some other shops. After a local and national public consultation on OTC medicines, we do not prescribe head lice treatment anymore.

Head lice can be difficult to spot; they're very small whitish or grey-brown insects that range from the size of a pinhead to the size of a sesame seed. The only way to be sure someone has head lice is to find a live louse by combing their hair with a special fine-toothed comb. There's no need for children to stay off school, or to wash laundry on a hot wash. Other signs of head lice include: small white eggs or nits (egg cases) in the hair behind the ears or at back of the neck, an itchy scalp, a rash on the back of the neck and feeling something moving in the hair.

How can I avoid?

You can reduce the risk of lice spreading by avoiding head-to-head contact and tying long hair up. Do not use medicated lotions and sprays to prevent head lice. They can irritate the scalp and are unlikely to work.

How do I treat?

Use lotion or spray (Chemical Method)

You can use medicated lotions and sprays that kill head lice in all types of hair. You can buy these from pharmacies, supermarkets or online. Lotions and sprays come with a comb to remove dead lice and eggs.

- Some treatments need to be repeated after a week to kill any newly hatched lice. Check the pack to see if they're OK for you or your child and follow instructions for use.
- Check for lice again after three to five days, and again 10 to 12 days after using the treatment. This is because not all the eggs may be killed by the first application.
- If lotions or sprays don't work, **speak to your pharmacist** about other treatments.

Detection Method (Non-Chemical)

You can use a detection comb which is a special fine-toothed plastic comb you can buy from a pharmacy, supermarket or online. Detection combing can be done on dry or wet hair. Dry combing takes less time, but wet combing is more accurate because washing with conditioner stops head lice moving.

To use the wet detection method:

- Wash the hair with ordinary shampoo and apply plenty of conditioner, untangle the hair with a comb.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb.
- Slot the teeth of the comb into the hair at the roots, with the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the comb down from the roots to the ends of the hair with every stroke, and check the comb for lice each time – remove lice by wiping the comb with tissue paper or rinsing it.
- Work through the hair, section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through.
- Repeat to ensure you haven't missed any areas and continue until you find no more lice.
- Check for lice again after three to five days, and again 10 to 12 days after using the treatment.
- If you find head lice, you should check the rest of your family and treat them on the same day.

The following treatments aren't recommended because they are unlikely to work:

- products containing permethrin.
- head lice "repellents".
- electric combs for head lice.
- tree and plant oil treatments, such as tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil and lavender oil herbal remedies.

For more information

- Visit your local pharmacy for advice.

Find out more about self-care at www.nhs.uk

Be self-care aware