

HEAD LICE (PEDICULOSIS)

A louse is a small wingless insect that lives as a parasite on humans, birds and other mammals. Most people recognize their white eggs called nits that are usually found on hair. These parasites bite their victims and suck their blood to survive. Most of the nits (look like grains of sand) hatch within 1 to 2 weeks. Risk factors increase with crowded conditions (e.g. elementary school children, prisoners, nursing home residents, seasonal camp sites, etc.); sharing clothing, combs, brushes or hats; and contact with other infested areas such as bedding and head rests on car, bus and airplane seats. Lice are contagious. It is not a case of poor hygiene.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Severe itching, skin *inflammation* (swelling, tenderness, warmth) and matted hair
- White nits found on hairy areas, especially head and neck
- Red rash and bite marks

What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose the condition by asking about your symptoms and examining the nits.
- Prescribe a medicated shampoo and cream rinse to kill the lice.
- Recommend a repeat treatment for severe cases of infestation.
- Remove nits from eyelashes. (Do not apply shampoo or rinses to eyelashes)

What *you* can do:

- Apply shampoo and rinse as directed by your doctor.

General recommendations include:

- Completely wet the hair and work shampoo into scalp
- Make sure the hair soaks for about 3 to 4 minutes
- Rinse the hair thoroughly with water
- Wash hair with cream rinse just prior to drying hair
- Dry hair completely with a towel (launder this towel before using again)
- Avoid getting medicated shampoo into eyes (rinse well if this happens)
- Do not leave shampoo or rinse too long on the scalp or overtreat. (Causes irritation).
- Apply hot vinegar to special nit comb and run through hair to remove nits.

Home Treatment:

- Wash all clothing and bedding in 120° F water (or have dry cleaned) as soon as possible.
- Dry clothing in hot dryer and iron clothing to kill lice and nits.
- Treat all family members infested with lice.
- Vacuum carpets, sofas, car seats, and chairs at home.
- Boil brushes, combs and hairpins in hot water for a minimum of 15 minutes or throw away.
- Put non-washable items (e.g. toys, stuffed animals) in sealed plastic bags for 2 weeks.
- Teach your child not to share personal items like a comb, brush or hat.
- Use your own bedding (e.g. sheets, linens, pillows) for camping and sleep-overs.

What *you* can expect:

- The shampoos kill the lice and eggs usually with one treatment. Your doctor may recommend a repeat treatment in 2 weeks. Itching stops within 5 days.
- Lice carry bacteria and other parasites that may cause a variety of infections.

Contact your doctor if you see lice or nits on your child's head or body; if your child cannot stop scratching; if other family members become infested with lice; or if you or your child develops adverse reactions to the medicated shampoos and rinses.