

HEAD ITCHES FROM HEAD LICE

While head lice used to be characteristic of poverty and poor hygiene habits, today they occur without rule and not by choice, even in countries with the highest standards of living. Head lice are not dangerous, but they are very annoying and unpleasant. With the right management, even this nuisance can be quickly eliminated!

What are head lice and nits?

Head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) are small insects without wings. The adult louse is as long as a sesame seed. It has a translucent body, which makes it hard to see in the hair. It turns brownish red after feeding on blood. It spends its entire life on the human head, where it stays on the scalp.

Nits are eggs laid by adult lice. The egg is oval with a blunt end, about a millimetre in size. They are mainly found behind the ears, on the nape of the neck and on the front of the scalp. Usually, lice attach a single egg (nits) to a single hair. The live nits are shiny brown in colour. They pop if squeezed with the fingernails. Dead nits are a dull white colour and do not pop when squeezed. The presence of live nits on the scalp is always an indicator that there is at least one adult live head louse on the head.

How do we get head lice?

Head lice are crawling insects that do not hop, jump or fly. They are usually transmitted by direct contact of the head with the head on which the head lice are found, and less commonly by combs, headgear or bedding.

Who is most susceptible to lice?

Everyone is susceptible to head lice, regardless of age, gender, race and socio-economic status, but head lice are more common in schoolchildren, mainly because of the closer contact between them, which allows lice to move from head to head. Tight living conditions play an important role in the spread of lice, although lice are not an indicator of a lack of hygiene.

How do we detect head lice?

By finding live lice or live nits on the scalp. Head lice cause **unpleasant itching**, children constantly scratch themselves, and abrasions form on the skin. Itching only appears a few weeks after we get lice. In some adults the itching does not appear, so they do not know they have lice.

Do head lice transmit diseases?

Head lice do not transmit disease, but their secretions certainly cause unpleasant itching. They cause children to scratch their heads constantly, which can cause the scalp to become inflamed, fever and swollen lymph nodes can occur. Children may experience insomnia as a result of itching.

LICE DETECTION AND PREVENTION

What do we do to detect head lice?

Regular scalp examinations allow us to quickly detect a problem and therefore take action. So check the scalp at least once a week, especially for children attending kindergarten or school. The lice tend to occur mainly after the holidays, after returning from outdoor education, when children start to gather in large numbers again.

Procedure:

- Cover the shoulders with a white towel or paper.
- Carefully **examine** the entire scalp, especially the nape of the neck and behind the ears.
- Examine the hair from the hair shaft to the ends, strand by strand.



TIP: The best way to see lice and nits is in daylight, and a good light and a magnifying lens can help. Wash your hands with soap after the procedure.

A better and quicker method than regular scalp examination is combing with a **dense comb**.

Procedure:

- Wash the hair with a shampoo that does not stain the hair.
- Cover the shoulders with a white towel or paper on which the lice or nits will be more visible.
- Start combing behind the ears, on individual strands of hair, from the hair shaft to the ends of the hair.
- The teeth of the comb should touch the scalp for as long as possible.
- After each stroke, carefully inspect the comb by wiping it with a paper tissue and discarding it in the waste bag provided.
- Repeat the process 3-5 times on each strand of hair.
- When you have finished combing, dispose of the bag in your regular waste and rinse the comb. Then soak in hot water (about 60°C) for a few minutes.
- The whole procedure takes 10 to 15 minutes.

ELIMINATING LICE

What do we do when we find lice?

De-lousing is the most effective procedure to eliminate head lice.

Procedure:

- Carefully follow the instructions for use of the head lice treatment.
- Apply on dry scalp.
- Spread it carefully all over the scalp, leave it on and then rinse with water.
- Repeat the process after 7-10 days.
- Between the first and second de-lousing process, comb through the scalp daily with a dense comb.
- Do not wash the hair for at least one to two days after rinsing off the treatment.
- We do not de-louse preventively, i.e. not if there are no lice or live nits.

After the de-lousing process is complete:

- **Wash** combs, brushes, laundry, clothes, towels, bed linen, etc. that have been in contact with the hair in hot water (around 60°C).
- Items that cannot be washed should be sealed tightly in a plastic bag and left at room temperature for 10 to 14 days or in the freezer for 24 hours.
- Vacuum upholstered furniture and carpets.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LICE REMOVAL PRODUCT

The success in eliminating head lice also depends on the choice of an effective product. Given the availability of preparations in Slovenia, we recommend:

1. A preparation of the permethrin group of insecticides in the form of a shampoo containing 1% permethrin in 20% isopropanol. **Not suitable for children under 2 months.** Two de-lousing procedure 7-10 days apart are required.
2. **For babies, very young children** and children who should not be treated with permethrin, we recommend using white petroleum jelly to coat the scalp, wrap it in a nappy or cover it with a bathing cap and leave it covered overnight. The process of rinsing ordinary petroleum jelly from the scalp takes several days.
3. 5% benzyl alcohol lotion is suitable for children over 6 months of age. Two de-lousing procedures seven days apart are required.



IMPORTANT: Combing on its own does not remove lice.

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE LICE

Head lice transmit diseases

No. They don't transmit disease, but they do cause unpleasant itching.

Head lice jump from head to head

No. Head lice are crawling insects and they do not jump, leap, fly or swim.

Only dirty people have head lice

No. Nowadays, lice are no longer an indicator of poor hygiene. Lice do not feed on dirt, they suck blood.

HEAD LICE

