

Lice Aren't Nice



Lice love our humid climate, so you can expect your family to get them *several* times! Children who complain of itchy scalps and scratch their heads a lot *usually* have lice. *Lice are fast, camouflaged and avoid light, so you seldom find them by **looking** for them. Instead, you find them by **catching** them with a nit comb.*

Professional Lice Advice Lice feed and stay warm enough to survive on the scalp, so start by detangling the hair. Have your child lean forward so that you can comb from the nape of the neck towards the crown, keeping the nit comb in contact with the scalp as long as possible. You are gently **raking** the scalp for lice. Pull the nit comb through the hair and look for lice **trapped** in the teeth. Adult lice are narrow, tan, and about as long as sesame seeds, but nymphs are as small as poppy seeds. My daughter was impressed that she could see “*their six tiny legs!*” Be sure to comb the nape of the neck, behind the ears and areas that feel “tickly.” It might take 5-10 minutes of combing to find them if there are only a few lice, but as one kindergarten student hilariously reminded her mom, “*Be sure you get the mother!*” Other classic signs of lice are black dirt-like specks on the scalp (lice poop), small scabs (from scratching) and *nits* (lice eggs). Nits are tiny ovals that are the same size as a knot in a thread. They are firmly cemented to the hair shaft. Any particle or flake that you can easily remove is *not* a nit.



The Best Nit Comb on the Market All of the professional services use this wonderful comb. It is sturdy and won't hurt your child's scalp like the cheap combs packaged with products like Rid®. Companies market it under various names (*The Terminator, Nit-Free, Fairy Tales, Lady Bug, etc.*), but they are *identical*. You can order online from Target.com or Amazon.com for \$12-25, and they are available at People's Pharmacy as part of the Fairy Lice Mothers™ kit (\$25), but they are not sold in retail stores.

Treatment Ask your pediatrician for help choosing among the myriad of options available. I am personally most excited about a new prescription medication called **Sklice**® (topical ivermectin) because it is the only *one-time* treatment on the market and it costs as little as a \$25 co-pay with a coupon that you can print from the manufacturer's website. The cost of lice treatment varies from \$15 to \$300 per person, and some of the products and techniques have never been clinically studied for safety and effectiveness. The *American Academy of Pediatrics* recommends **Nix**® (1% permethrin lotion), available over-the-counter for \$15-20. There are several other prescription medications, such as **Ulesfia**® (benzyl alcohol 5%), **Ovide**® (malathion) and **Natroba**® (spinosad), that cost \$150-300 per person, and a recent addition, **Lycelle** (an occlusive), that costs as little as a \$25 copay with coupon. There are over-the-counter occlusive products (**LiceMD**®) that claim to smother lice, **Fairy Lice Mother**® products that claim to contain an enzyme that breaks down the exoskeleton of lice and professional services that claim to dessicate lice with heated air (**Lousebuster**™) or comb out the lice in their salon or your home. You can review a fairly recent clinical overview of lice treatment (*Clinical Report-Head Lice, Pediatrics 2010*) at www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2010-1308.

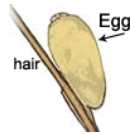
How to Avoid Treatment Failure with Nix® Before using **Nix**® **Crème Rinse**, shampoo the hair with **Prell**® shampoo. *Do not use conditioner.* Apply Nix® to *damp (not wet)* hair. Use the amount recommended for the *length of hair.* *Do not scrimp on the amount!* Do **not** use a vinegar rinse to loosen nits; do **not** wash the hair with shampoo for 2 days; and do **not** use a conditioner for 2 weeks. **Re-treat with Nix**® in **exactly 9 days** to kill newly-hatched lice before they reproduce. Comb the hair meticulously for 14 days. If you find *live lice*, start over.

Lice spread easily whenever heads are close together (hugging, playing, sleepovers) and when brushes or hats are shared. Lice cannot jump and do not survive more than 24 hours off the scalp. *You do not need to spray the furniture.* Heat (130° F) kills lice and nits, so soak combs and brushes and wash sheets, blankets, pillowcases and clothes worn in the last 24 hours in *hot water*. Put items that can't be washed (hats, coats, stuffed animals) into a hot drier or seal them in plastic bags for 2 weeks (the longest period *nits* can survive). Animals and pets do not carry lice, and lice do not spread disease. If nits are more than 1 cm (1/4 inch) from the scalp, they are *empty* egg cases (already hatched). It is common to feel the sensation of lice crawling even after they have been eliminated. Use your nit comb to see if there are any hitchhikers before you assume there is a re-infestation.

What do Lice Look Like?

(from the www.cdc.gov website)

Head lice have three forms: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult.



Actual size of the three lice forms compared to a penny. (CDC Photo)

Egg/Nit: Nits are lice eggs laid by the adult female head louse at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp. Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft and are oval-shaped and very small (*about the size of a knot in thread*) and hard to see. Nits often appear yellow or white although *live nits sometimes appear to be the same color as the hair of the infested person*. Nits are often confused with dandruff, scabs, or hair spray droplets. Head lice nits usually take about 8-9 days to hatch. Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located no more than ¼ inch (or 1 centimeter) from the base of the hair shaft.

Nymph form. (CDC Photo)

Lice use claws to grasp onto hair. (CDC Photo)

Adult louse. (CDC Photo)



Nymph: A nymph is an immature louse that hatches from the nit. A nymph looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. *To live, a nymph must feed on blood.* **Nymphs mature into adults 9-12 days after hatching.**



Treatment Resources

Your child may return to school immediately after treatment.

Professional Services

- www.madcapsalon.com
- www.fairylicemothers.com
- www.texaslicesquad.com
- www.licedoctors.com
- www.lousted.com

Over-the-Counter Products

- Nix® (1% permethrin lotion)
- LiceMD® (Dimethicone gel)
- Fairy Lice Mothers® kit (Peoples Pharmacy \$25)