Managing Head Lice

Head lice is common in children but can affect adults too. While not a dangerous condition, it can be uncomfortable and sometimes tricky to manage. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate this condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

**Vocabulary to Know**
Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Louse (Lice)</td>
<td>A parasitic insect that feeds on blood. There are three types of lice—head lice, body lice, and pubic lice—and they are completely different from one another. Head lice, in particular, live on your scalp and in the hair on your head. They move around by crawling and cannot hop or jump from one person to another.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insecticide</td>
<td>Chemicals that harm, kill, or repel parasites and other insects. In the case of head lice, insecticides may be applied to the scalp or taken by mouth. Unfortunately, there is increasing resistance to over-the-counter treatments. If one of these treatments is not successful, you may need to turn to your doctor for a prescription medication.</td>
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<td>Nit</td>
<td>Louse eggs and nits are not the same thing. When a female louse lays eggs, she secretes a glue-like substance that allows them to stick to the hair shaft. The eggs are placed near the scalp where the body temperature is warmest. They will hatch in seven to 10 days, leaving behind an empty shell. This is what is known as the nit. As your hair grows, these nits are pulled further away from the scalp. A nit that is more than 0.6 centimeters (0.25 inches) away from the scalp is unlikely to be viable and is most likely dead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nit (Lice) Comb</td>
<td>Nits can be small and difficult to see, especially if someone has lighter colored hair. A nit comb is a fine-toothed comb, preferably metal, that can help to find and remove nits and lice from the hair. A nit comb is best used on wet hair so that the glue that sticks the nit to the hair can be loosened and more easily removed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pediculosis</td>
<td>The medical term for infestation with head lice.</td>
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Questions to Ask
These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage head lice.

About Symptoms

- Itching on the scalp can also be caused by conditions like dandruff and eczema. How can I tell if my child has head lice?
- Some of the treatments for head lice list itching as a side effect. How can I tell if itching on the scalp is because my child still has an infection or if they have a complication from the medication?
- How long can symptoms last after a successful treatment?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- Is my child at risk for head lice if they do not wash their hair every day?
- Is it okay for a child go back to school if they still have nits in their hair?
- There was a head lice outbreak at my child’s school. Should I treat my child as a precaution, even if I do not see any nits or lice when I check their hair?

About Diagnosis

- I do not see any head lice when I check my child’s hair. What are the odds that they are still infected?
- Are there ways to diagnose head lice other than looking for nits and lice in the hair?

About Treatment

- My daughter has long hair. Should I cut her hair to make it easier to get rid of head lice?
- What medication options are available and how effective are they? Will my insurance cover them?
- Are there natural remedies I can try so that I do not expose my child to medication?
- I washed all our clothes with hot water and vacuumed my carpets and furniture. Are there other measures I can take in the home to prevent another infestation?