

EXPRESS SCRIPTS CANADA
PHARMACY



Head Lice

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What are head lice?

Lice are tiny insects that can only survive by sucking on human blood. Head lice are spread mainly by head to head contact with an infested person's hair although they can also be spread by sharing hats, combs as well as other personal hygiene maintenance products.



Forms of head lice

1. NITS

Nits are eggs of head lice. An adult female louse lays around 7 to 10 eggs daily and lives up to 30 days. These nits attach to the hair shaft and take around a week to hatch. They are usually seen as tiny white specs and are sometimes difficult to see.

2. NYMPH

These are baby lice. Nymphs take around 7 days to mature into adult lice after hatching.

3. ADULT LICE

Usually 1-3mm long and have 3 pairs of legs with claws. Head lice usually do not survive more than 48 hours after being separated from the person.

How do I know if I have head lice?

- Itchiness around the back and sides of the scalp
- Nits (tiny white specs) are seen upon physical examination of the scalp – you might need a magnifying glass to see them
- Feeling of something moving in the hair

How to get rid of them?

1. **Disinfecting combs and brushes** – soak all combs and brushes that are used by the person who has head lice in a disinfectant solution (eg. Rubbing alcohol) for 30 minutes to an hour.
2. **Treatment of the bedroom** – make sure to wash all bedding, towels, stuffed animals as well as hats, headbands and other head gear in a hot water washing machine cycle. This ensures that the nits and lice are killed. For items that cannot be washed, place them in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks.
3. **Nit removal** – it is important to remove lice and nits using a nit comb because they are fused to the hair shaft.

Pharmacological options

1. Permethrin 1% cream rinse (Nix)

- First line treatment because of its low toxicity
- Applied to damp towel dried hair and left on for around 10 minutes
- Treatment needs to be repeated after 7 to 10 days
- Not to be used on people who are allergic to chrysanthemum or ragweed
- 96% to 100% efficacious when used properly

2. Dimethicone (Nyda)

- Needs to be applied on dry hair and left on for 8 hours and then washed off
- Hair can be combed with a lice comb after 30 minutes of application to remove nits and lice
- Treatment needs to be repeated after 7 to 10 days
- 97% efficacious when used properly
- Not recommended for use on infants or children less than 2 years of age

3. Pyrethrins with piperonyl butoxide (R&C)

- Should not be used on people who are allergic to chrysanthemum or ragweed
- Needs to be left on dry hair for 10 minutes and then lathered followed by rinsing
- Treatment needs to be repeated after 7 to 10 days
- 94% efficacy rate after second application

4. Isopropyl Myristate Cyclomethicone (Resultz)

- Needs to be applied on dry hair and left on for 10 minutes
- Treatment needs to be repeated after 7 to 10 days
- 57-93% efficacy

Tips

- Follow directions listed on the product leaflet for any over the counter treatment products you pick. Always consult your pharmacist if you have any sensitivities or allergies to any ingredients listed in the products.
- All treatments must be repeated in 7 to 10 days to ensure complete eradication of lice. If treatment is not successful after two applications, consult your health care professional
- Consult your pharmacist or other health care professional if you have head lice and are pregnant
- Wash bedding and all other personal gear using the hot cycle of the washing machine
- Family members and close contacts should be examined and only treated if they are infested with head lice
- Oral antihistamines can be used to relieve the itching; however, always consult your pharmacist or other health care professional prior to using them
- Tea tree oil, lavender oil as well as other herbal options can be used to treat head lice, however, there is no adequate evidence for efficacy therefore pharmacological options are preferred

Disclaimer: The information found in this brochure is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or physician. If you have any questions specific to your health, please contact your healthcare provider.

References:

1. Parasites - lice - head lice. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>. Updated September 24, 2013. Accessed January 19, 2016.
2. Perlstein D. Head lice. MedicineNet. http://www.medicinenet.com/head_lice/page8.htm. Updated November 5, 2015. Accessed January 19, 2016.