

Non-insecticidal Home Treatment for Head Lice

10-Day Hair Conditioner Treatment

The use of hair conditioner is helpful in the process to remove head lice. Apply white hair conditioner to the head before using a nit comb (fine tooth comb) to remove live lice and eggs (nits). Any type of hair conditioner may be used, preferably white in colour, including inexpensive 'generic' brands, together with a nit comb. It is an alternative to pesticide treatments.

How does it work?

The hair conditioner prevents the lice from crawling and makes it easier to trap them in the teeth of the comb. Hair conditioner also makes combing the hair easier, especially when using a nit comb.

Why the 10-day treatment period?

Lice eggs will hatch between 7 to 10 days after being laid on the hair shaft. The 10-day treatment period is recommended as it is the most effective time to break the reproductive cycle of the head lice. Lice lay about six eggs a day. If even one or two lice are missed, the cycle of infestation will continue.

Instructions

- Apply plenty of hair conditioner to the hair until completely soaked. White hair conditioner makes it easier to see the head lice.
- Comb conditioner through with an ordinary comb or brush to remove tangles.
- Comb and separate sections of the hair with a nit comb in four directions – forwards, backwards, left and right. Use additional conditioner if the comb pulls the hair or the hair is too dry.
- Wipe the comb on a white paper towel to check that the lice and eggs are being removed. You may need to use a magnifying glass and a strong light to see the lice and eggs.
- Rinse the hair conditioner from the hair, then dry the hair.
- Repeat this process every day for 10 days to cover the hatching period of the eggs.
- After completion of the 10-day treatment, continue to check for lice or eggs once a week for at least four weeks.
- Check all other household members for head lice using the method described above.

Sources: CPS Infectious Disease and Immunization Committee, University of Toronto, Public Health, Framingham School Health Services, Harvard School of Public Health