

## dr. leigh's true facts about head lice

head lice are biting insects which are very tiny - about the size of a poppy seed.



they can **only** live and reproduce on the scalp of a human - not in the eyebrows, eyelashes, pubic or body hair, hats, sheets, hairbrushes, or teddy bears of a human. they can not live on cats or dogs, chickens or rabbits, or anywhere else. (other animals have their own kinds of lice, which can not live on humans!)

they can not survive longer than a day away from the person's scalp, and can not survive more than about 20 minutes of hot water or air (in a washer or dryer).

they can not fly, jump, or burrow. they can only crawl around and cling to hairs.

they **spread by direct contact** of one head touching another, or by sharing combs and brushes.

the amount of blood they drink in a day is about 0.003 milliliters, or four hundredths of a drop.  
**twenty-five** headlice would, working together, take just **one drop of blood** in 24 hours.

when the mother gives birth to her eggs, she glues them to the strands of hair, where they look like tiny bumps, tiny pearls, or tiny grains of sand. they are called "nits."

her eggs can not hatch unless they are stuck to the hair near the person's scalp. they need to be within 1/2 inch of the scalp - eggs that are farther away are unlikely to hatch. they can **not** hatch and grow on combs, hairbrushes, or hats.

**head lice do not spread diseases.** they do not even spread blood-borne infections or viruses.

some people with headlice become more itchy than others, due to becoming allergic to the bites.

it is normal to feel itchy when you are thinking about head lice. it is a psychological reaction. it does not mean you have head lice.

pubic lice ("crabs") are a different species. they can live in pubic and body hair (but not in head hair, and not on teddy bears, dogs or chickens, etc.). otherwise, crabs are basically the same as head lice.

**body lice are completely different.** they live on skin, and in clothing, **not hair**. they can be killed by hot water and hot air.

**head lice are nothing to be afraid of, or ashamed of, or revolted by.**  
**they are not dangerous.**  
**they are not dirty.**



**they are just tiny bugs.**

## **dr. leigh's easy plan for dealing with head lice**

1. teach your children (and their friends, and your friends, and their school) not to be afraid of or worried about head lice.
2. examine the hair under bright light. do you see tiny eggs ("nits") stuck to the hair, close to the scalp, and live head lice that are crawling around? if not - do nothing! check the hair again in a week.
3. if you see live head lice and nits, go buy a fine-toothed steel comb at the drugstore.
  - apply olive oil, hair conditioner, or any other mild grease to the entire scalp, and comb the lice and nits out.
  - give your child something interesting to do while you are combing. be patient. use a bright light.
  - after combing, wash and dry the hair as usual. you can use a vinegar or lemon rinse after washing (which might help melt the eggs), if you want.
  - repeat every 3rd day, for a total of about four sessions (takes about 10 days total).
  - note: empty or dead eggs, which are pearly or colorless, will not hatch, and do not need to be removed.
4. if you can't get or use a fine-toothed steel comb, or if you are in a hurry, you can use a shampoo or lotion that contains a pesticide (permethrin or pyrethrin). buy it over the counter, and follow the directions on the box.
5. if you use the special shampoo, re-check the hair after about 10 days. you might need to repeat the treatment.
6. machine wash and dry hats, hoods, and pillowcases, and wash combs and brushes in hot water - or simply remove and don't use them for a few days (lice and nits can't survive away from the scalp).
7. it is common for head lice to recur. for this reason, it is best to simply use a comb instead of repeatedly using pesticides.

### **dr leigh's dos and don'ts for beautiful hair (and head lice)**

- **don't** use pure essential oils (such as lavender, eucalyptus, or neem), which may be toxic when absorbed through the scalp.
- **don't** use mineral or motor oil, which dry out and can damage the scalp.
- **don't** use solvents such as alcohol, listerine, lysol, ammonia, "skin so soft" insect repellent, peroxide, or herbal tinctures, which are much too harsh.
- **don't** use hot or boiling water, a hot blow dryer, curling iron, hot comb or rollers, or any other electrical appliances, which can cause burns.
- **don't** use expensive enzymatic or other fancy remedies, which could cause an allergic reaction. simple, inexpensive treatments work just as well.
- **do** be gentle with the fine toothed comb! do not worry about eggs that are stuck to the hair more than 1/2 inch from the surface of the scalp, because they are unlikely to hatch.
- **do** use pure, plain kitchen ingredients: olive or coconut oil for combing through the hair (loosens up the bugs).
- **yes, you can** use mayonnaise, though plain oil is cheaper and works just as well.
- **you can also** use a plain vinegar or lemon rinse after washing (melts the eggs), if you protect the eyes with a washcloth.

**please call your doctor if you are in doubt as to whether you,  
or someone you care for, truly has head lice.**

#### quick bibliography:

harvard school of public health: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>  
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