

*Where once a single treatment of a pediculicide was sufficient to get rid of head lice,
parents now report treatment failure after multiple doses.*

Nit Picking: A safer way to treat head lice

Judie Squires © 2006

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The idea of head lice becoming resistant is not uncommon. Insects are resilient creatures.

Over time they can become resistant to any chemical. It seems that no matter what we humans do to control them, they just keep coming back for more.

Pesticide resistance is a huge problem, pests are constantly evolving; the big, the bad and the ugly survive. Survival of the fittest. Every time synthetic chemicals are used to kill pests, be it sprayed on a lawn to kill weeds or insects or in your home to rid ants and earwigs or used on your child's head for removing lice, a few naturally resistant members of the population survive and create a new generation of pests that are stronger and more poison-resistant. That generation then breeds another more-resistant generation; eventually, the pesticide may be rendered ineffective or even kill other beneficial organisms and cause harmful effects to what we are intending to protect.

Chemical treatments for head lice contain potent pesticides known as pediculicides, including Organophosphates, Pyrethrin, Malathion and Pyrethrum. These pediculicides have been known to cause immune suppression, seizures, vomiting, diarrhea,

convulsions, circulatory collapse behavioral changes, neuromuscular damage, chronic skin eruptions, liver damage, asthma, respiratory failure, stillbirths, birth defects, cancer and even death.

Unfortunately, the good intentioned parent using treatments containing pesticides may tend to use more, leave them on for longer periods of time or even apply them too often, increasing the health risks to their children.

Lice, on the other hand, besides being a terrible nuisance, do not cause the harm that some of these pesticide treatments can. Lice are not dangerous and they don't spread disease, remember that although they are unpleasant, lice neither transmit disease nor make children sick. In order to protect children's health, parents and health professionals would be wise to adopt a more natural approach when dealing with head lice.

So what do you do? Stuck between a rock and a hard place with resistant lice on one-hand and toxic pesticides on the other. There are safer more effective ways to remove head lice.

For best effectiveness, use a safe, pure old-fashioned coconut oil soap like Dr. Bronners liquid soap, (<http://www.drbronner.com/>) this soap is also available with tea tree oil which is known to be effective in killing lice without causing resistance. You will need a proper lice comb and a lot of persistence.

Make sure when you are removing lice that you are in an area that is not carpeted, preferably a bathroom or outside. Make sure there are no hiding places for lice or nits such as rugs on the floor, towels or clothes lying around.

Next, tie the hair up on top of the child's head, While he hair is dry, start at the nape of the neck along the hairline and work around the head saturating the hair in soap as you move towards the crown where the hair is tied up. Remove the elastic and continue to completely saturate the hair. Work a comb through the soapy hair then wrap or tie the hair back up on top of the head and cover in a plastic bag or shower cap. After a half an hour has past, rinse hair in very warm water and coat in olive oil, coconut oil or preferably neem oil, comb through again, cover with a plastic cap and wrap in a warm wet towel for another 30 minutes.

Use hot water and the liquid soap to thoroughly wash the child's hair. Use a hair dryer on the warmest setting to dry, then comb to remove any remaining lice or nits. The drying and "nit picking" should be done outside if possible, and never on carpet. Clean all surfaces and floors with the same soap after working on hair. Do not use anti-bacterial soap or disinfectant.

Besides head cleaning and nit picking, All fabrics in the home including clothing, blankets, pillows, rugs and mats should be laundered in hot water at least 140 degrees and the old-fashioned soap, do not use antibacterial, scented soap or fabric softeners. Hang fabrics on a line if possible, and toss in a dryer on high heat.

Items that are not washable, such as mattresses, stuffed animals and sofa pillows, should be placed in a plastic bag or cover and sealed for 30 days, causing the lice to suffocate. Carpets, furniture and car seats should be vacuumed thoroughly. After each vacuuming, the vacuum bags should immediately be removed from the vacuum cleaner, sealed in a plastic bag and disposed of outside of the house. Do not spray with any pesticide sprays. This will only compromise the immune systems of those living in the house.

And remember you do not need to feel embarrassed or ashamed of head lice. It is a myth that head lice like dirty heads; in fact, there is evidence that lice actually prefer clean hair. An infestation does not indicate poor hygiene, and is nothing to be ashamed of. Head lice are transmitted by direct contact, or by the sharing of brushes, combs, hats, scarves, coats, bedding, towels or upholstered furniture. Since they're specific to human heads, you can't get them from pets or wildlife.

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Since 1999, Judie has been aggressively researching a wide range of subjects, particularly those pertaining to human health and environmental issues. Judie has written for local, regional and national publications.