



Wet Combing Method to Get Rid of Head Lice and Nits

Wet combing is a non-chemical way to eliminate head lice and nits.

The safest and easiest way to get rid of head lice and nits is by using the Wet Combing Method.

Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. It is about removing the live lice and viable nits from the head. Combing treatments can be done every 3-4 days over a 2 week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are full grown and able to lay more eggs and removing viable nits before they are able to hatch. This option is low cost and safe but takes time. The science behind wet combing:

1. **Shampoo and rinse hair, leaving it wet.** During wet combing occasionally spritz hair to keep wet. Water temporarily clogs the louse spiracles resulting in immobilized lice. It goes into a state of suspended animation and remains hanging onto the hair of its host. (Canyon D, Speare R. *Int J Dermatol. Do head lice spread in swimming pools?* 2007 Nov; 46(11):1211-3). Head lice have been seen to hold tightly to human hair and not let go when submerged under water. (CDC - Global Health: Division of Parasitic Diseases).
2. **Saturate hair with a conditioner.** Massage ample amount of conditioner into the hair from the roots to the ends until hair is well coated. Do not rinse out the conditioner.

Use hair conditioner to lubricate. (Deborah J. Pontius, *Demystifying Pediculosis: School Nurses Taking the Lead*, Pediatric Nursing/September-October 2014/Vo. 40/No.5).

3. **Comb through hair with a wide toothed comb**
Combing with a wide-toothed comb helps evenly distribute the conditioner throughout the hair. The teeth of a lice and nit removal comb will slide through hair much more easily if it has been detangled first.
4. **Comb through hair with a lice and nit removal comb**
These tiny eggs (nits) are firmly attached to the base of the hair shaft within approximately 4mm of the scalp with a glue-like substance produced by the louse. The louse feeds by sucking tiny amounts of blood from the scalp every few hours. (The American Academy of Pediatrics, Clinical Report—Head Lice, Pediatrics Volume 126, Number 2, August 2010).

Wet lubricated hair allows for easy movement of a lice and nit removal comb through the hair so as to reach the roots at the scalp where lice and nits lay.

5. **Repeat every 3- 4 days for 2 weeks**
With patience and diligence it is possible to remove all lice and nits at the first combing. But, it is recommended to comb hair every 3-4 days for up to 2 weeks. It takes a maximum of 10 days for the viable nit to hatch so by the last combing all lice and nits will be removed. If after a combing no lice and nits are present, process can be stopped.

Wet comb all infested household members at the same time. Unless you treat all infested household members, head lice can be passed on from one person to another when heads touch.

We would like to second the comments of Bainbridge, Klein, et al, in their recent article in their Clinical Pediatrics, that fine toothed combing of nits and adult lice out of the scalp hair is of paramount importance in treatment of head lice. Although our laboratory is vigorously testing various compounds for clinical effectiveness in nit removal, fine toothed combing of dripping hair after shampooing with conditioners is the best known method for nit removal. The hair should be wet, for this decreases the mobility of the adult lice. In fact, some advocate lengthy sessions of combing by itself as a therapy for head lice.

Head Lice Therapy Revisited, James Arbogast, PhD Chemistry Department, Lourdes College, Sylvania, Ohio. *Clinical Pediatrics*, June 1998.