**Title: Head Lice: Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment**

The inability to control yourself from scratching an itchy scalp is an irritating moment. If this situation occurs while you are with a group of people, it becomes embarrassing as well. Head lice infestation is an unwanted condition that is common and contagious. It is more common among children and can spread to adults around them. But the good part is that the condition does not lead to any serious disease and head lice treatment is fairly simple.

Understanding the causes and paying attention to the symptoms could let you take the right treatment. Read ahead to know the intricacies of this condition and how can you get rid of it.

**What is Head Lice?**

These are tiny, wingless bloodsucking insects that reside in the hair on your scalp. These parasites feed off human blood from the scalp. Lice is plural for the word *louse.*

A louse is a small parasite and can move all over your scalp that makes it tough to spot it. This becomes more prevalent in individuals who have thick hair. Louse lays eggs on hair shafts. These small white eggs are called *nits* and are the very first symptom of an infestation. These are as tiny as dandruff flakes

**Symptoms**

Itching is the first and one of the most common head lice symptoms. An infestation causes so much itching because the scalp gets affected by an allergic reaction to lice saliva. Too much of such a reaction causes uncontrollable scalp itchiness. Someone might be very sensitive to such an allergy and suffers from severe itching. And another person might not at all get affected by louse saliva and thus develop tolerance to itching. One might not even experience itching during the first 2 - 5 weeks of head lice infestation. Some other symptoms of head lice include :

1. Being able to feel that something is crawling on your scalp
2. Difficulty in falling asleep due to irritation
3. Sores on the scalp due to rough itching
4. Swollen lymph nodes

**Causes**

Head lice are contagious and the most common cause of an infestation is that you have probably got it from an already infected person/object or area.

You could get head lice if :

1. You touch your head with an infected person’s head
2. You share an infected person’s hair care objects like comb, brush or a massager
3. You use an infected person’s towel or other clothing right after they use it for their hair
4. You come in contact with lice via other inanimate objects like headbands, headphones, hats, etc. within 24 hours of their usage by an infected person

**Hair Lice Treatment**

The eggs that lice lay on your scalp hatch quite quickly which results in a rapid build-up of an infestation. The treatment of this condition is to kill these lice and its eggs as soon as detected. Any treatment that does not attack the eggs will have to be repeated. One can follow effective Ayurvedic methods or home remedies as they first observe hair lice. In the case of severity, a person should seek medical guidance from an expert.

Here are a few treatments that you can undertake to get rid of hair lice :

1. **Ayurvedic Cure**

Ayurveda offers some of the most trusted and effective remedies for a variety of conditions. It is preferred because Ayurvedic treatment does not have any side effects and is successful incomplete removal of lice and nits.

1. **Onion**

Mix one tbsp of onion juice with half tbsp of white vinegar. Apply this mixture on your scalp and keep it for an hour. Rinse it off with lukewarm water. Comb wet hair, from the roots to the tips, with a thin - tooth comb.

1. **Garlic**

Apply garlic paste in your hair and on the scalp. Massage for 1 - 2 minutes and keep it for 25 - 30 minutes. Rinse it off with lukewarm water. Comb wet hair, from the roots to the tips, with a thin - tooth comb.

1. ***Neem***

*Neem* or Indian lilac leaves also work well to cure hair lice. Boil 10 - 12 neem leaves with 4 tbsp coconut oil. Let it cool. Apply this oil, as required, over your scalp and in hair. Wash it off with a mild shampoo and wet comb using a thin - tooth comb.

1. ***Anise***

One of the most powerful natural remedies to treat hair lice is *anise.* Boil 2 anise with 2 tbsp coconut oil. Let it cool. Apply this oil, as required, over your scalp and in hair. Wash it off with a mild shampoo and wet comb using a thin - tooth comb. This oil kills hair lice by coating it which leads to its fatal dehydration. Using it for thrice each week for 4 weeks will show positive results. You can continue this treatment for 2 - 3 months. But if there is no improvement even after that, reach out to an Ayurvedic practitioner.

1. **Medication**

The most common over the counter product used to treat hair lice are:

* Permethrin

Commonly called Nix, this is a synthetic form of pyrethrin. It should be applied 9 - 10 days after the first application. A major con of this product is that it kills only the lice but spares the eggs which hatch very quickly and live as lice in your hair.

If permethrin does not work do not work, the doctor might prescribe other medications like :

1. **Benzyl Alcohol**

This product works by depriving the lice of air. It can only be used for adults and children older than 6 months. Redness, however, is a common side effect of this product.

1. **Ivermectin**

This product is very effective to kill lice. It can be directly applied to dry hair. It should be rinsed after no more than 10 minutes. A doctor might also prescribe it as oral medicine. This product can only be used for adults and children older than 6 months of age.

1. Other medications like **spinosad** could be used for infected people who are more than 4 years old and **malathion** can be used with people above the age of 6. These can be reapplied in 7 - 9 days and should rinse off within 8 - 12 minutes of application
2. **Hair Lice Removal Shampoos**

Medicated shampoos can also be used to treat hair lice. These are available online and at medical stores. Most lice removal shampoos have the above stated medicinal products. A number of shampoos claim to remove both lice and nits. Before application, it is essential to make sure that the product does not cause any allergic reactions on your scalp. Prior consultation is recommended.

1. **Home Remedies**
	1. **Combing Techniques**

One of the most popular and effective home remedies to get rid of hair lice is to wet comb the hair with a fine-toothed nit comb. It is also suggested to apply some amount of lubricant (like coconut oil) to wet hair. The entire head from roots to hair tips should be combed for 2 - 3 times in a session. This process can be carried out for 3 days for two to three weeks until there is no more louse in the hair.

* 1. **Petroleum Jelly**

A less common but effective method used to cure lice as well as nits is the application of petroleum jelly. It suffocates the insects and its eggs. One can apply it and then comb with a fine-toothed nit comb for visible results. This method can be carried out by someone who is allergic to shampoos and plant-based oils. While it is an effective option, it could turn out to be a little messy since the jelly in itself too greasy, and washing it off completely takes more time than usual.

* 1. **Oils**

A number of researches have shown that some natural oils can be effectively used to kill lice and eggs. This is due to a chemical compound called nerolidol which is found in , a chemical compound found in many plant oils and is effective in treating hair lice. You can use :

1. **Olive Oil**

It is said that olive oil can be as effective to kill lice and nits as anise oil. It prevents lice from coming back. For utmost benefits, one can apply a mix of anise and olive oils to the scalp and hair. Keep it for 1 - 2 hours and wash off with cold water. Wet comb with a fine-toothed nit comb for best results. You could easily get olive oil online or at a medical or departmental store.

1. **Coconut Oil**

One of the most recommended oils for any type of skin and hair conditions is coconut oil. An international study showed that coconut oil can kill hair lice if kept for at least four hours. It attacks lice by drying out its waxy outer shell which kills the lice out of suffocation. Ask any home remedy expert, coconut oil would be the first suggestion when it comes to treating lice and nits. It is, in fact, more effective than other over the counter products.

1. **Tea tree Oil**

Yet another popular oil to treat skin and hair conditions is tea tree oil. It is available in the market in concentrated form and should be applied along with a carrier oil. This however has some side effects like rashes and redness. If you experience any such irritation, stop its application immediately. However, if it suits your scalp you can use it twice or thrice a week for 3 - 4 weeks to see positive results.

Apart from the above-mentioned oils, some other effective but less common oils are :

* ylang-ylang oil
* eucalyptus oil
* lavender oil

**Can Lice Go Away on its Own?**

Though it's very rare, it is possible that hair lice go away on their own when there are not enough parasites to expand the infestation.

Another case is that these lice stay on a person’s scalp without causing significant symptoms for a very long period. But the lack of the right treatment, the complication is bound to increase. It is important to follow the right treatment to get rid of hair lice completely. The insects can go away completely within two weeks if the condition is not severe.

**For How Long is Lice Contagious?**

Research shows that lice can not survive for more than 24 hours if they do not get a host environment

Lice cannot fly or jump to a new host. Only if the infected person/object comes in direct contact within the 24-hour time frame, the infection can spread further. It is possible to find lice on objects like pillows, hats, scarves, or comb. These objects can be unknowingly used by an uninfected person. To prevent yourself from this condition, you can follow some measures which would considerably reduce the risk of infection.

**Measures to Prevent Hair Lice :**

Simple ways to prevent yourself from getting hair lice are :

1. Avoid touching your head directly against an infected person’s head. Advice kids to not share hair objects with other kids.
2. Keep your scalp clean and ensure that you don't leave your scalp damp
3. Sweat on the scalp and in hair also induces hair lice. Try to dry (or wash and dry, if possible) your hair to create an environment that makes it suitable for lice growth.
4. Keep the towels, furniture, brushes, pillows, etc clean. However, avoid using toxic pesticide sprays on such objects.
5. Disinfect hair brushes and combs on a regular basis. It is suggested to keep such objects in hot water for 15 - 20 minutes.
6. Wash towels and beddings in hot water.
7. Check on your family members for head lice especially if there are kids in the family.

Head lice is a common but manageable condition. You must take note and be proactive if you suffer from itching consistently for a few days. There might be a possibility that you have got hair lice via direct contact with an infected person or an object. But the good news is that you can easily get rid of these insects with proper treatment and regular care. Ayurvedic and home remedies are popularly considered to be the most effective hair lice treatments.

Trusted Sources :

1. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>
2. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
3. [www.healthline.com](http://www.healthline.com)
4. [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net)