

Lice

Lice are parasites that live by infesting humans and sucking their blood. There are several types of lice.

What to look for

- **Head lice:** intense itching on the scalp, especially behind the ears and at the nape of the neck.
- **Body lice:** unexplained scratch marks on the body, hives, eczema, and red pimples.
- **Pubic lice:** continual itching around the pubic area.

Lice are not usually dangerous but they do cause considerable annoyance and irritation. They are also very contagious and should be treated to avoid spreading the parasite.

Head lice (nits) are highly contagious and frequently affect school children because they can easily jump from child to child. The lice are about the size of a sesame seed and can be easily seen. However, their eggs are not so easily seen.

Pubic lice (crab lice) are crab like insects which cling to the pubic hair and transmitted by close personal or sexual contact.

Body lice are nearly identical in appearance to head lice but are more difficult to find. They occur less often than head lice and need to feed regularly. They thrive in condition in which the person does not change clothes very often. When not feeding, they tend to hide in clothing and bedding.

Causes

Contrary to common belief, lice are not related to poor hygiene, except occasionally in the case of body lice. Lice will transfer from host to host and especially thrive in densely populated areas.

Traditional Treatment

Your doctor will attempt to remove the lice – this can take time as they can also be in clothes and bed linen.

There are treatments available in pharmacies that will get rid of head lice. They are usually in the form of a shampoo.

In the meantime, it is advisable that people infected with lice stay away from others to avoid spreading the lice. Continually wash and sterilise all bed linen, clothing and towels and face washers.

To treat body lice, wash the entire body with soap and water. If this is not effective, you may have to use an insecticidal preparation, which usually kills all the lice. As above, wash all clothing and bed linen, towels and face washers.

Pubic lice are treatable by over-the-counter preparations and the same applies as above. Also you should let any partners know about the lice so they can take all the necessary treatments and precautions.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Several alternative treatments may make it easier to get rid of lice.

Aromatherapy – For treatment of head lice, wash the hair and rinse slowly with 6 drops each of essential oils of [rosemary](#) and red thyme mixed in a litre of warm water. You may substitute this combination with 12 drops of essential oil of [lavender](#).

Dry the hair naturally, then comb with a fine-toothed comb. For prevention, soak your comb in water with 10 drops of essential oil of red [thyme](#), and comb hair thoroughly.

Prevention

It is vital to try to prevent major outbreaks of this condition, especially head lice. Notify your school authorities if you suspect your child has head lice.

When to seek further professional advice

- You are unable to get rid of lice or if scratching has led to infection