



# How to Recognize Body Lice Symptoms

Two Methods: [Detecting Lice](#) [Eliminating the Infestation](#)

Body lice are tiny parasitic bugs that can infest an individual, invading the body and feeding off of its blood. Approximately 2.3 - 3.6 mm in length, body lice live in clothing and furniture--typically the bedding of an affected individual--and only move to a human host when they have matured and it comes time to feed. Because of this nature, body lice are rarely detected on the surface of the skin, leaving those who have been infested curious as to the cause of any recent skin irritations.

Method  
1

## Detecting Lice

- 1 Know the common symptoms of body lice.** When body lice feed they can cause an allergic reaction in the skin. These reactions include:<sup>[1]</sup>
  - intense itching
  - rashes on the skin, particularly the armpit and waistline areas of the body
  - red spots or elevated bumps on the skin
  - thickened or darkened skin
- 2 Examine your skin for any irritations.** Irritations on the skin can be caused by bites or by repeated scratching--both are indicators of body lice. Repeated scratching can also cause further blistering, which can lead to a bacterial or fungal infection.<sup>[2]</sup>
  - Be sure to check the waistline, upper thigh, and groin areas specifically.
- 3 Check the skin for lice.** Sometimes body lice can be seen while feeding on the skin. Although this is not very common, you should nonetheless examine the waistline, upper thigh, and armpit areas of the body for lice. Body lice are the same approximate size, shape, and color of a poppy seed.<sup>[3]</sup>
  - Check any areas of the skin that are irritated.
  - Check any areas of skin that are darkened or calloused.
  - A magnifying glass will help, but is not absolutely necessary.
- 4 Turn an article of clothing inside out.** Body lice live mainly in the seams of clothing.<sup>[4]</sup> Only after hatching and maturing, do body lice invade the skin.<sup>[5]</sup>
  - Although it is rare, body lice can lay eggs directly on the human body.<sup>[6]</sup>
- 5 Examine the seams.** Mature lice cannot live longer than five-to-seven days after falling off a host. Because of this, it is more common to find lice eggs, or "nits," in any article of clothing .
  - Nits are oval in shape, and can be yellow or white.
  - Nits are generally found in the waistline and armpit areas of clothing.<sup>[7]</sup>
  - Nits will hatch in one-to-two weeks.<sup>[8]</sup>

Method  
2

## Eliminating the Infestation

- 1 Maintain a regular personal hygiene regimen.** Most cases of body lice will go away once the body has been cleansed of any nits or lice.<sup>[9]</sup> Unlike hair or pubic lice, body lice only invade the body when they need to feed and are not consistently present on the skin.

- Nits are rarely laid on the body.

**2 Visit your physician.** Your doctor will be able to provide you with prescription creams and body-washes that will help reduce any skin irritations or allergic reactions that may have resulted from body lice feeding (or from excessive scratching).

**3 Use a pediculicide.** In extreme cases, doctors may recommend the use of a pediculicide. Popular over-the-counter pediculicides include "Clear," "Rid," and "Nix." Pediculicides are designed to kill lice in one of two different ways.

- Ovicidal pediculicides kill nits and only need to be used a few times.
- Non-ovicidal pediculicides kill mature body lice, but not nits. It is therefore recommended that non-ovicidal pediculicides be used on a regular basis to avoid re-infestation (from nits that hatch).

**4 Delouse personal items.** Be sure to wash all articles of clothing, bedding, and towels in water that is at least 130-degrees fahrenheit.<sup>[10]</sup> This will kill any lice or nits.

**5 Machine-dry articles of clothing in high heat.** Unfortunately, machine-drying certain articles of clothing may not be possible. Due to the high risk of re-infestation, however, you should consider destroying these pieces.<sup>[11]</sup>

**6 Seal articles of clothing that you do not want to destroy in a garbage bag.** Isolate infested items in a garbage bag for five-to-seven days, then rewash separately.<sup>[12]</sup>

**7 Vacuum upholstery, mattresses, and carpets thoroughly.** Vacuuming will remove any lice or nits that may have made their way into the seams and cracks of furniture.<sup>[13]</sup> Nits can lay dormant for up to two weeks, so it is imperative that you prevent them from being transmitted to another host by eliminating their presence in common areas.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Community Q&A

### Could lice that last over five weeks be some other kind of bug?



Use the tips in this article to determine if it is lice or not. If it's lice and you are treating it, it's possible that you keep re-infesting yourself with contaminated bedding, clothing, or furniture.

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## Tips

- Improved [hygiene](#) and regular changes of clothes will cure a body lice infestation.
- Body lice infestation is most often spread by close physical contact, but this usually only occurs in unhygienic conditions (such as refugee camps, [homeless](#) shelters, etc). Cats, dogs, and other pets do not spread body lice.
- The use of chemical insecticides, such as dusting or fumigation, is sometimes necessary to prevent and control the spread of certain diseases by body lice (epidemic typhus).

## Warnings

- Body lice are known to spread disease. A body lice infestation should be taken care of as soon as possible.
- Epidemics of louse-borne relapsing fever and typhus have been caused by body lice.
- "Vagabond's disease" is a condition caused by an infestation of lice for a significant period of time. The condition consists of darkening and hardening of the skin in areas heavily bitten, usually the mid-section of the body.
- Intense scratching can lead to serious secondary infections.

## Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.healthline.com/health/body-lice#Symptoms3>
2. [http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/body/gen\\_info/faqs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/body/gen_info/faqs.html)
3. [http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/body/gen\\_info/faqs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/body/gen_info/faqs.html)

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