



# How to Recognize Head Lice

Two Methods: [Checking for Head Lice and Nits](#) [Checking for Symptoms](#)

You might recognise whether you have head lice. Head lice are greyish brown insects that live on your scalp and feed on blood. Seek medical help for an examination if you feel itchiness very often and may also see little bugs come out of your hair as you itch.

Method  
1

## Checking for Head Lice and Nits

- 1 Use a fine-toothed louse comb to help identify living head lice.** Head lice move quickly and avoid light, so a fine-toothed comb will be handy in a thorough examination.
  - You can check for lice with both dry or wet hair. If you're checking with wet hair, wash and condition your hair before going over you hair with a comb.
  - In order to check your hair with a fine-toothed comb, use these steps:
    - Use an ordinary brush to detangle hair
    - Switch to the fine-toothed comb and start combing at the front middle of the scalp
    - Comb the hair from the roots to the ends, examining the comb after each stroke
    - Do this over your entire head
  - People with thicker hair may want to look for lice after washing their hair. In this case, using conditioner, or one tablespoon of olive oil, may make running the nit comb through your hair easier.
- 2 Look for nits (head louse eggs) at the base of the hair shaft using the same technique.** Nits don't move, so they'll be easier to spot. Pay careful attention to the areas behind the ears and near the base of the neck when checking for nits.
- 3 Use a magnifying glass to make identification of head lice easier.** [Dandruff](#) and dirt can sometimes be mistaken for head lice.
- 4 If you find lice or nits, be sure to treat the person showing signs of head lice.** You can treat them in the following way:
  - Try a non-prescription lotion or shampoo. Their main ingredient is often 1% permethrin. Apply the lotion of shampoo as directed, waiting 8 to 12 hours and then checking for active lice again.
  - Try a prescription strength lotion or shampoo. Malathion 0.5% may be prescribed in cases where non-prescription lotions or shampoos do not have the desired efficacy. It is supposed to be left in the hair for a period of 12 hours.
  - Make sure the lice don't spread:
    - Wash all clothing and bedding in hot water immediately
    - Remove any lice and eggs you come out of the person's hair
    - Do not share clothing, especially articles like hats that are worn on the head

Method  
2

## Checking for Symptoms

- 1 Look for the following symptoms a tickling feeling or an itching sensation in your hair.** It's pretty much what it sounds like. Humans are allergic to the (very small) amounts of saliva that lice inject into the skin in order to retrieve blood.<sup>[1]</sup> If you have intense itchiness in your scalp area, check for head lice.

- 2 Look for sores on the head caused by scratching.** These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria normally found on a person's skin.
- 3 Look for small red bumps on the scalp.** These bumps are caused when the lice farm blood from your scalp. They may ooze or become crusty.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Community Q&A

### What if my head is sometimes itchy, but I don't think I have lice? Should I use a treatment anyway?

wikiHow Contributor  
It's normal to get some itching sometimes, and it usually doesn't mean anything unless it's really persistent. With lice, you will usually feel a crawling sensation or a sharp pinch. If you're concerned, sk a doctor or nurse to check out your head. If you do have lice, use a treatment.

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### Do lice live on a particular type of hair, ie: ethnic, straight, curly, etc?

wikiHow Contributor  
Head lice can live on any type of hair.

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### How can I tell if it's dandruff or lice?

wikiHow Contributor  
Dandruff is white, limp and fails to move. Lice move around and are a brownish color. Sometimes you will see bigger bugs which are normally black.

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### Can nits be black?

wikiHow Contributor  
No. Nits are never black, so they are easy to spot in dark hair. Nits are a white color, while very large full grown lice may be a dark brown or a black color.

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### Can lice get on pubic hair?

wikiHow Contributor  
Yes, pubic lice is known as crabs and spreads mostly through sexual contact.

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### How can I differentiate between dandruff and nits?

wikiHow Contributor  
Both are whitish, but dandruff is generally flaky, irregular shaped, has non-smooth edges, and will be loose in the hair or close to the scalp. Nits are smooth-edged, shaped like a tiny almond, and are attached along the hair.

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### What if the lice is just now hatching, and your mom doesn't see it?

wikiHow Contributor  
Lice is pretty easy to look for. Just get a comb and check. But if your mom does not see it, get a treatment just in case.

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### Do lice suck blood?

wikiHow Contributor  
No.

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### How big can they be?

wikiHow Contributor  
It depends on how much blood its sucked, but it won't get any bigger than at largest, a dime.

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## Can you answer these readers' questions?

 Refresh

On **How to Heal a Torn Dog ACL Without Surgery**, a reader asks:

What are naturopathic options?

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On **How to Calculate Unemployment**, a reader asks:

I was employed in California, but move to another state after I was laid off, would i still be eligible for unemployment while I look for a job in a new state?

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On **How to Hack Clash of Clans on Android**, a reader asks:

Which hacking tool is working?

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## Tips

- Adult head lice will appear darker in color on the heads of people with dark hair.
- A prescription is not always required for medications used to treat head lice. Over-the-counter medications are generally all that is needed.
- Prevention is the best cure. The following steps will help you avoid a head lice infestation:
  - Vacuum furniture and floors, particularly where an infested person sat or slept. However, re-infestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing is unlikely.
  - Avoid contact with carpets, couches, beds, pillows, or stuffed animals that have been in contact with an infested person.
  - Do not share clothing such as coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, hats, scarves, or barrettes.
  - Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs that may be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin. They are not necessary to control head lice.

## Warnings

- Itching, or pruritus, is a common outcome of a head lice infestation. Care should be taken to avoid damaging the skin with excessive scratching.

## Sources and Citations

- <http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/diagnosis.html>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/treatment.html>
- <http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/diseases/facts/lice.htm>

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