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INSIDE: Best Doctors

Gah! Lice!

What to do when the parasitic insects invade your kid's hair

There is nothing particularly modern about lice. For at least 10,000 years (a nit, perhaps seeking a proper afterlife, was found on a buried mummy in Brazil in 8000 BC), parents have been scratching their heads over what to do about these tenacious bugs. Treatments of yore included honey, borax, seawater and, in the case of ancient Egyptians, shaving heads, donning a wig and calling it a day.

What *is* modern is that we now have so-called super lice, which are impervious to drug store remedies. What are grossed out parents to do if they suspect an attack of super lice?

First, it's fine to be icked out, but don't waste time being ashamed. Lice happen. It doesn't mean anyone's dirty or doing anything wrong. It means your kid had head-to-head contact with someone who has lice. That is exactly how they all sit when they're showing a friend something on their phone.

Second, find out what you're dealing with by investing in a quality lice comb (in a pinch, you also can use a good metal flea comb). Wet the hair and comb through sections. After each pass, wipe the comb on a white paper towel and you might see black dots or full-on adult lice. If you look closely, you might also see little white dots clinging to hair strands. These eggs look like dandruff, but they stick onto the hair and don't brush off easily. Scratching can be a clue as well, but only 50 percent of people with lice actually scratch, so the comb is the way to go.

If lice it is, you have two options —




home treatment or enlisting the help of professional lice removers.

Home treatment

"We suggest an all natural enzyme-based treatment (\$35-\$40) and a professional-grade metal nit comb (NitNabber or Nit Free Terminator; about \$15). We suggest treating every four days for two weeks (three weeks for severe cases)," said lice expert Pam Skinner, owner of Picky Pam at the Beach, a lice removal salon in downtown Huntington Beach.



Jill Hamilton
Columnist

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Her webpage (LiceFreeKids.com) has a bunch of helpful how-to videos, including

a tutorial that shows how to do a comb-out at home.

Professional treatment

There are dozens of lice treatment centers throughout Orange County. At Picky Pam, they'll do a free head check with an appointment. Prices vary by level of infestation.

"Based on the appointment, we can tell if they are clear, moderate or severe," Skinner said.

A clear check is free. Mild is a recent infestation of usually a week or less, costs \$95 and takes about an hour. Moderate is when lice are beginning to hatch, usually 1 ½ to three weeks. It costs \$135 and it takes about 1 ½ hours. Severe is more than 100 eggs with lots of hatched lice. It costs \$175 and includes a dehydration process.

"Our treatment protocol is: enzyme, section, comb, nitpick with magnification and a headlamp, re-

enzyme, braid or bun, spray with prevention spray," Skinner said. "We do all the nit combing, and no additional combing at home is required. We provide a clearance form so they can return to school or any activity the same day."


If you want to try to avoid lice, you can talk to your kids about leaning in too close to other kids, put long hair in braids or buns and/or regularly apply preventative treatments. Skinner recommends Coco Loco All Natural Treatment or Apple Attack Shampoo.

The last time our family had lice (yes, there has been more than one time. See above: don't judge), we unknowingly brought it with us when we visited various relatives throughout Michigan. One ungrateful relative with a bug phobia promptly freaked out upon the discovery of this unwanted hostess gift. She sealed off the house and set off numerous bug bombs, which shot plenty of toxic chemicals into the air but did exactly nothing to the lice.

Her reaction actually wasn't that weird. According to Skinner, she's had clients who:

- Used bleach on a 10-year-old daughter's head after reading on the internet that bleach kills lice. (It does on brushes, but not on heads).
- Took an oral flea pill prescribed for dogs.
- Put ant and bug spray on their 4-year-old child. When it didn't work, they repeated it the next day.

These are all very bad ideas.

If you want to share your lice horror story, have questions or just want to yell at me for giving you a sudden urge to furiously scratch your head, feel free to write to me. 

Jill Hamilton is the mother of two teenage girls and lives in Long Beach. You can email her at jilllongbeach@yahoo.com

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