

How to Get Rid of Lice

A mom gives the advice she wishes she'd received when her 7-year-old daughter got lice.

By Rebecca Wolsk



Step #1: Head(s) first.

Following the advice of basically everyone—our pediatrician, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the CDC, and the Harvard School of Public Health—we put our heads before housecleaning.

We began our rampage with nontoxic Cetaphil cleanser (our pediatrician's preference), using the method outlined at [Nuvo for Head Lice](http://www.nuvoforheadlice.com) (<http://www.nuvoforheadlice.com>). This didn't work for us (*aaack!*), so we used over-the-counter, FDA-approved pediculicides. The products killed the lice, but their eggs, a.k.a. nits, are infuriatingly hardy. We treated again about a week later (product guidelines vary slightly) to zap hatchlings.

Step #2: Clean where your kid's head's been.

We washed and dried bedding, towels, and clothing on the highest heat setting. If your pillows can't handle that, have them dry-cleaned and create stand-in pillows by stuffing pillowcases with towels. We used trash bags to seal anything fabric or furry that couldn't be machine washed or dry-cleaned. The CDC recommends a two-week seal.

We vacuumed the bedrooms and the car, using a handheld vac on mattresses and car seats. You can also drape bed sheets or plastic sheeting over upholstered furniture. I covered our car headrests with plastic bags.

Good news for pet owners: Head lice require people.

Step #3: Comb, hunt, pick.

Manual removal is nightmarishly time-consuming, but it's also safe and effective. I did this twice daily at first, then I did it once a day until I stopped finding nits. It cleared up my daughter's head and gave us peace of mind.

Karen Franco from [Advice on Lice](http://adviceonlice.com) (<http://adviceonlice.com>) saved me hours by recommending the [LiceMeister comb](http://www.headlice.org/licemeister/index.htm) (<http://www.headlice.org/licemeister/index.htm>). Another time-saver: Nits stick like glue to the sides of hair shafts, and I'd been sliding each nit off each strand with my fingernails. She suggested using scissors to snip off infested strands.

We also benefited from frequent sessions with a professional nitpicker. If you haven't suffered lice, you may grin at the title of "professional nitpicker," but I now regard that job as one in league with a pediatric cardiologist or commercial pilot.

Many cities have lice-focused salons:

- New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles: [Hair Fairies](http://www.hairfairies.com) (<http://www.hairfairies.com>)
- California's Bay Area: [LoveBugs](http://www.lovebugsllice.com) (<http://www.lovebugsllice.com>) and [NitPixies](http://www.nitpixies.com/home.html) (<http://www.nitpixies.com/home.html>)
- Florida: [LouseCalls](http://www.lousecalls.com) (<http://www.lousecalls.com>)
- Seattle: [Lice Knowing You](http://www.liceknowingyou.com) (<http://www.liceknowingyou.com>)
- Washington, D.C. area (Kensington, MD): Karen Franco of [Advice on Lice LLC](http://www.adviceonlicemd.com) (<http://www.adviceonlicemd.com>)

If none of these businesses are near you, ask your school nurse or your pediatrician for recommendations. Also check local newspapers' online archives. Regular hair salons won't cut infested hair.

Step #4: Limit the time spent online seeking answers.

Our lice experience lasted three weeks, which sounds heartbreakingly long, but we wanted to do all we could to avoid recurrence and/or infesting our daughter's classmates and friends. I tried to view the revolting drudgery not as an interruption of our family life, but as an incredibly difficult way to express love.

On the worst night, my husband painstakingly compiled a game plan based on information from the [CDC](http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/index.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/index.html>), the [American Academy of Pediatrics](http://www.aap.org)

(http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Lice.htm), and the Harvard School of Public Health

(<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>).

This quote from yoga guru Baron Baptiste relieved some frustration: "The thing that blocks your path is your path." Lice streamlined our family's path.

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