



Self-Care – Head Lice Guidance in Care Homes

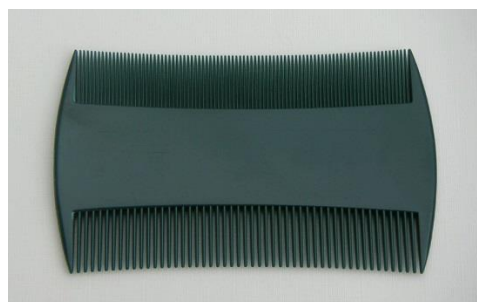
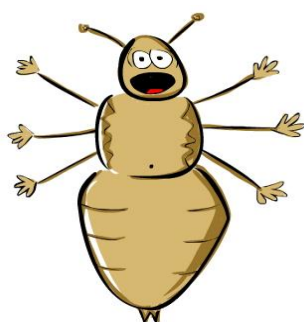
Taking care of your “SELF” – Supporting Everyone to Live Freely

This is a self-care guide designed for those working in care homes, residential homes and assisted living.

The information provided in this guide does not replace person-centred clinical advice.

The following information should be used as a guide when advising or purchasing self-care treatments for people residing in a care home, residential home or assisted living. Self-care medication and medical products are not always the most appropriate choice for treating minor ailments. Sometimes starting with a lifestyle change or trying natural remedies can be more effective.

Should you have any concern, at any time around self-care items being purchased on behalf of the resident or being brought in by relatives for the residents use, please discuss with your community pharmacist or GP practice.



What are head lice and nits?

- A head louse is the name used to describe the insects, while nits are the name used for their eggs
- Nits can be yellow, brown or white (empty shells) and attached to the hair
- Head lice don't have anything to do with dirty hair and are usually picked up from head-to-head contact
- They are most common in children, however can often spread quite quickly in close spaces such as a care home

How do head lice feed?

- The louse will move around very close to the skin on the scalp until it finds a suitable vein to feed from
- The head louse then pierces the skin with its mouthparts, adding saliva to the wound, to prevent the blood from clotting while it eats
- The louse ingests the blood via two small pumps in its head



- The louse will never leave their host as the host provides a constant food source. They will only move if by coincidence they grab onto a new hosts hair strand
- Head lice are only able to crawl. They cannot jump or fly. They do, however, crawl very fast on the strand of hair
- They require head to head contact to transfer

How do you know if a resident has head lice?

- The resident may complain that their head feels itchy or that they feel something is moving in their hair
- You can visibly see the louse or nit on the hair
- A residents relative informs you that they or a family member has attended the home and then discovered they have head lice
- You may want to advise or assist in checking the residents hair for live lice or eggs

Treating head lice:

If one resident is confirmed to have head lice, it is essential to check all residents' hair to ensure they have not spread throughout the home

- Always treat head lice as soon as you spot them to avoid the infestation spreading to other residents, staff or relatives
- Medicated lotions and sprays are available to treat head lice infestations. These products can be purchased over the counter from local community pharmacies, shops or supermarkets
- Following use of medicated treatments the lice should usually die within a day
- Lotions and sprays come with a comb to remove dead head lice and eggs
- Some treatments will need to be repeated after a week to kill any newly hatched lice
- Check the product packaging and directions before use, making sure they are the most appropriate option for the resident
- If lotions or sprays don't work, speak to your pharmacist about other treatments and recommendations

Treatment is needed only if you see one or more live lice. Empty eggshells (nits) do not always mean that you are infested with lice.

Using the comb - 'Wet combing' method:

- If the resident doesn't want to use medicated treatments, they can always purchase a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb for 'wet combing') from their local community pharmacy, shop or supermarket to remove head lice and nits. The packaging will provide directions for use
- Combing takes approximately 10 – 30 minutes, depending on the thickness and length of the hair
- The comb can be used on wet or dry hair – although it usually works best on wet hair with conditioner



- You will need to advise or assist the resident to comb the whole head of hair, from the roots to the ends
- Have a white paper towel ready to collect the lice as they come away from the hair
- You will need to advise or assist the resident to repeat this routine **at least** four times, every four days. The number of sessions required depends on the last time you see lice:
 - The first combing session should remove all hatched head lice but does not remove eggs. Therefore, lice that hatch from eggs after the first session may still be present.
 - Subsequent sessions clear newly hatched lice. Keep doing the combing sessions every four days until you have had three sessions where no lice are detected.
 - Once you have had three sessions where you do not see any lice, it usually means that you are then free of lice.

Treatments unlikely to work:

- Products containing permethrin
- Head lice "repellents"
- Electric combs for head lice
- Tree and plant oil treatments, such as tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil and lavender oil herbal remedies

Prevention:

- There is no way to prevent head lice. Don't use medicated lotions and sprays to prevent head lice as they may irritate the scalp
- You can reduce the risk of lice spreading by avoiding head-to-head contact
- You could consider head lice advice for relatives when visiting the home with young children

You should not need to contact the GP for head lice advice and treatment.

All treatments can be purchased over the counter from local shops, supermarkets or community pharmacies

The community pharmacist will be able to provide advice for use

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References:

NHS Choices - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-lice-and-nits/>

Lice World - <https://liceworld.com/how-to-diagnose/>

Patient.info <https://patient.info/health/head-lice-and-nits/treating-and-preventing-head-lice-and-nits>