

Head lice are small parasitic insects that cling to scalp hairs. They lay eggs, called nits, at the base of the hair shaft. These nits grow to become nymphs, and eventually adults.

Lice infestations most commonly affect young children. It's not uncommon for caretakers and household members of infested individuals to catch lice, as they're spread through head-to-head contact.

Luckily, there are many [medications and home remedies](#) to treat lice. Natural lice treatments focus on mechanical removal of lice and nits or attempts to suffocate the lice. This article will cover 11 home remedies that work best.

Wet Combing

One of the [most effective ways](#) to remove lice—and the only method for children aged two months and younger—is through wet combing.

Wetting the hair temporarily keeps lice from moving as they cling to the hair follicles. Oils or leave-in conditioners can make hair easier to comb through.

While hair is wet, use a fine-tooth lice comb to remove larvae, nymphs, and nits. Wipe the comb clean after each pass through the hair to ensure you're not redepositing nits or larvae back onto the scalp.

Repeat this process every 2-3 days for 9-14 days. Though this method can be time consuming, it's [effective in removing lice](#) without relying on medicated treatments.

Cetaphil Cleanser

This method calls for coating the entire scalp and hair in a thick quantity of Cetaphil (a gentle skin cleanser) before drying the mixture into a brittle texture with a hair dryer.

This causes the lice to remain stuck in place.

When cleanser is applied and allowed to sit on hair for at least 8-12 hours, the lice eventually suffocate.

Once the wait is over, rinse and comb out the lice and nits.

You may need to repeat this process up to three times.

Vinegar

The idea behind this method is that the acetic acid in [vinegar](#) works to break down the shells and natural adhesive that glues nits to the hair shaft.

However, a study showed that [vinegar was ineffective](#) in treating head lice.

Mayonnaise

This home remedy aims to smother or suffocate the lice.

Mayonnaise can be quite messy to apply and remove.

It isn't particularly pleasant to leave on your head for many hours.

Petroleum Jelly

[Petroleum jelly](#) has been proven to have more efficacy than other smothering treatments.

One study demonstrated that only [6% of lice eggs hatched](#) after petroleum jelly treatments.

That said, 6% of eggs hatching can still create a secondary round of infestation.

With any lice-smothering attempt, follow up with fine-tooth combing to ensure complete removal.

Olive Oil

One study showed olive oil to be among the [most effective of the natural remedies](#) they tested.

Oils are consistently more effective when used with a shower cap to ensure full coverage over a longer period.

Oils can be easier to work with and pass a comb through than thicker substances like petroleum jelly or mayonnaise.

Coconut Oil

Coconut oil also works to suffocate lice and has been shown to be especially effective when combined with [anise oil](#).

A study from Brazil found that after a four-hour period of coconut oil application, up to [80% of lice were dead](#).

Coconut oil can be difficult to apply and comb out, as it hardens in colder temperatures.

Tea Tree Oil

Though many people are sensitive to tea tree oil, it has been shown to be effective at killing lice.

One study showed a [100% mortality rate](#) after 30 minutes of treatment.

A tea tree oil-scented spray or shampoo may be useful in preventing reinfestation.

To minimize skin sensitivity, dilute this [essential oil](#) in a carrier oil such as coconut, olive, or almond oil.

Tea tree oil may be considered an endocrine disruptor, so caution is advised before considering use in children.

Lavender Oil

Lavender oil has proven beneficial in treating lice when combined with tea tree oil.

There isn't enough data to prove that lavender oil alone can treat or prevent lice.

Lavender also works as an insect repellent but isn't the strongest option.

As with any essential oils, dilute lavender oil in a carrier oil to avoid irritation.

Lavender oil may be considered an endocrine disruptor, so caution is advised before considering use in children

Heat

Lice and their eggs can't survive temperatures above 128.3°F for longer than five minutes.

Heat in this range is too hot for soaking your scalp and hair, so this method is only effective when laundering clothing and bedding items.

Lice can't survive away from their hosts, so you don't need to launder your entire wardrobe.

Simply wash and dry the clothes worn by affected family members within a week of infestation in temperatures of at least 130°F.

You can ensure lice and nits that have been removed from the head die by soaking brushes and combs in very hot or boiling water for 5-10 minutes.

When to See a Medical Professional

Check with your medical professional if [home remedies aren't working](#) or you continue to see a resurgence of head lice.

Don't opt for extra or higher doses of pesticidal shampoos, as these may be counteractive and increase irritation.