

HOW TO GET RID OF **HEAD LICE**

the traditional way vs. the alternative way

There are three types of over-the-counter lice products available at pharmacies. Lindane, the oldest, contains a neurotoxin that attacks the lice's nervous system and is similar to DDT. (It's not recommended for young children.) R&C, Nix and Kwellada-P contain neurotoxins, too, but they are less harmful and can be used on children. And Resultz, the newest of the three, targets the exoskeleton of the louse, instead of its nerves. It's considered to be the least toxic to humans, because we don't have an exoskeleton. To limit children's exposure to any of these chemicals, wash their hair in the sink rather than the bathtub. Plus, you're supposed to leave the product on for 10 minutes or less.

Recently, I've heard that lice are becoming resistant to neurotoxins. It's important to follow the directions, because none of the treatments are 100-percent ovicidal, meaning they don't kill all of the eggs. Seven to 10 days after the first application, do a second one to kill newly hatched nits.

It's also important to nitpick: Separate your child's hair into sections, add conditioner and then comb through it with a nit comb.

Some people use tea-tree oil to get rid of lice, but I've heard that poses risks, too, like allergic reactions and irritation. One woman came into the pharmacy after trying tea-tree oil. Three weeks later, her kids were still scratching like crazy. If there's a product out there that works for sure, I'd rather just use that.

For lice, I'd do a herbal rinse: You mix four cups of apple-cider vinegar, four cups of water and a quarter-ounce of an essential oil like thyme, tea-tree, sassafras or lavender. I find thyme is the most effective. For a young child (under seven), I'd use less than a quarter-cup of the mixture. Massage it into the scalp for half an hour, then rinse. (Since the thyme can be irritating to the eyes, be careful when rinsing.)

Essential oils are antiparasitic; they kill the lice by suffocating their cells. The vinegar soothes the scalp, which can be mildly irritated by the thyme and is also probably already irritated from being scratched.

Next, I'd rub moisturizing olive or coconut oil into the scalp to loosen the nits and then comb through the hair with a nit comb, which is available at pharmacies. Then rinse the hair with water. Make sure you wash clothing and linens using hot water and dry them on the hottest setting.

Repeat the whole process every day for three days in a row. Wait a week – long enough for the nits to hatch again – and repeat again, for three days.

The drugstore shampoos are chemical-based, not very eco-friendly and at least mildly toxic; they often cause skin irritation and rashes. I've used the natural alternative with my nieces and nephews, and it worked perfectly. It's definitely worth a try. If it doesn't work, you can always try the over-the-counter shampoos as a last resort. ■

DU LA,
naturopathic
doctor at the
Toronto-Centre
Naturopathic
Medicine.



**LAURA
BOLTON-
DEBUSSCHERE,**
pharmacist
at Lakeview
Pharmacy in
Saskatoon.

