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Treating Head Lice with Essential Oils

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the human head and lay their eggs (nits) among the hair. They feed off blood they draw from the scalp and can bite as many as a thousand times a day. These little parasites are an extremely common problem among school age children, who spend much of their day in close contact to one another, looking at books, sharing secrets and giving one another hugs. They are passed from one person to another through head to head contact and can sometimes be tough to get rid of if not caught quickly. The head doesn't become itchy until they have completely settled in and multiplied, so it is important that you check your child's hair regularly, brush it thoroughly every day and you could even use a preventative spray or hair spray to try and keep these pests at bay.

First let's clear up a couple of myths. They are not transmitted via furniture, carpets or in school buildings. They are indiscriminate and do not prefer a certain hair type, colour or style, and they are not a sign of poor hygiene as they tend to prefer clean over dirty hair.

When treating head lice it is very important that you use something effective in killing both the eggs and the adults in order to completely remove the problem. As lice are becoming more resistant to the products on the market containing pesticides such as Pyrethrum and Malathion, essential oils are a great option in helping with both prevention and removal of head lice. Best of all, they are a natural, chemical free alternative to covering your child's head with insecticides.

Studies conducted by writer and biologist Lowana Veal on lice in a laboratory setting noted the following findings in her article for AGORA:

When mixed in a 40% alcohol solution, a 50:50 blend of Tea tree and Cinnamon leaf killed 96% Eggs. A 30:70 ratio blend of peppermint and nutmeg killed 82% eggs and all adults. Oregano oil had 100% mortality with both eggs and adults. As did aniseed and cinnamon leaf. Tea tree had 93% adult mortality and 83% egg mortality.

When she subsequently used water instead of alcohol, she found that aniseed still killed 100% of both eggs and adults, oregano killed 99.3% eggs and 100% adults, tea tree killed 94% adults and 59% eggs, cinnamon leaf killed 86% adults abut only 26% eggs.

In another Queensland study showed a blend of Eucalyptus and Lemon scented tea tree to be an effective treatment.



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There are many oils to choose from when it comes to tackling head lice, but this is our list of essential oils we believe to be most effective:

Tea tree
Cinnamon leaf
Oregano
Peppermint
Aniseed
Eucalyptus
Lemon Eucalyptus
Lemon Scented Tea tree
Lavender

Choose your preferred oil, then in a base of either jojoba oil, water or a 40% alcohol such as Vodka, add 10 drops of oil to 50ml. Rub into scalp and leave on over night. Wash off in the morning with shampoo.

Then rinse through the hair with a cup of 50:50 water and vinegar and 3 drops of the same essential oil you used initially. Repeat the whole process again a week later.

We recommend doing a patch test on the skin before applying to the scalp over night in case of sensitivity. For children with sensitive skin it would be a good idea to use jojoba oil as your base.

For a preventative spray you could try this recipe:

50 drops of your chosen essential oil(s) from the list above
20ml Jojoba oil
2ml Polysorbate 20
Top up with 100ml distilled water

Shake before use and spray the hair every morning before school.