

A How-To Guide for Nit Combing

Head lice are common in school-aged children, residents of congregate living settings, and people who have close, head-to-head contact with others. If head lice are found in a person's hair, it has nothing to do with how clean the person is or the environment they live in.

This guide will help explain the steps of nit combing, which is the process of using a specialized comb to remove "nits" (lice eggs) from a person's hair.



Why is nit combing important?

Nit combing helps remove nits that are in the hair of someone who has head lice. There are several treatment products available that are designed to kill head lice, but not all treatment products kill nits. If nits are not treated or properly removed from the hair, new lice can hatch, lay more eggs, and the problem will continue. Proper nit combing takes time, but it is necessary to treat and stop a head lice infestation.

Before you start...

- **Check the hair of all household members and/or close contacts** using a bright light and magnifying glass (if needed). If lice are found, it is important to treat all infested individuals at the same time whenever possible.
- **Make sure you have the right kind of nit comb.** Nit combs are usually included with the purchase of over-the-counter head lice treatment products. Nit combs should be metal (not plastic) and have long teeth that are very close together. The narrow spacing between the teeth allows for small lice and nits that are stuck to the hair to be removed while combing. Metal flea combs, available at most pet stores, can also be used.
- **Nit combing takes time – but it's a very important step!** Depending on how thick or long a person's hair is, nit combing can take an hour or more because all parts of the hair should be combed completely.



Nits are usually glued to the hair and can be difficult to remove with a nit comb, so some parts of the hair will need to be combed multiple times. Nits can also be removed by using a fingernail to pick off the nit from the hair, or by using a pair of scissors to cut the individual hair strand below where the nit is attached.

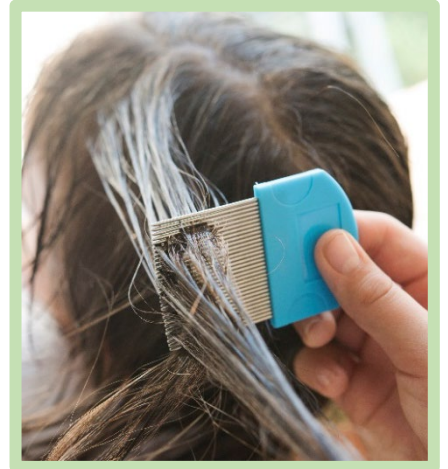
Things you need before getting started:

- Finely-toothed, metal nit comb
- Bright light source
- Magnifying glass (if available)
- Regular comb or hairbrush
- Spray bottle with water
- White towel or sheet
- Bowl of soapy water
- Paper towels or facial tissues
- Clips or hair bands

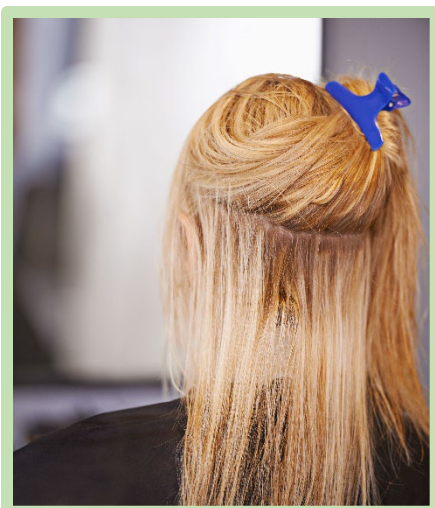
****If dealing with a head lice infestation in a child, it may be helpful to provide the child with an activity or video to keep them entertained.**

How to Comb for Nits

1. Work in an area with a bright light so you can easily see through the person's hair. Cover the shoulders and back of the person with a white towel or sheet to make it easier to find any lice that may fall off while combing.
2. Wet the hair and comb through with a regular comb or brush to remove any tangles (it is easier to comb wet hair).
3. Separate the hair into small sections, about the width of the nit comb. Use the nit comb to comb each section of hair, starting at the scalp and moving to the tip of the hair. Comb each section several times from root to tip before moving on to a different section of hair.



- Head lice lay nits within $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the scalp (about the thickness of a pencil), so it's important to get as close to the scalp as possible when combing. Nits that are found further away from the scalp are most likely already hatched or are dead.
 - If nits or lice are found while combing, remove them from the comb by rinsing the comb in a bowl of soapy water and wiping the comb dry with a paper towel or facial tissue before using again.
 - For people with short hair, sectioning the hair may not be possible. If that is the case, comb all the hair to the right, then to the left, and then from back to front. This should be repeated several times.
4. After a section of hair has been combed, use a clip or hair band to clip or tie the hair back. Then move on to the next section. Use a spray bottle to keep the hair damp or wet while you comb.



5. Once the hair has been combed through using the nit comb, sanitize or clean the clips and nit comb by soaking them in hot water ($>130^{\circ}\text{F}$) for 5–10 minutes. The towel, sheet, or any other pieces of clothing used during nit combing should be washed in hot water and then placed in a clothes dryer on the hot cycle.

Remember: Carefully inspect and comb the infested person's hair **every other day for 2 weeks**. This will help you find and remove any nits that you may have missed, or any new eggs that have been laid since you last combed the hair.

Actual Size:

Nits on Hair

Lice

