

Step-by-Step Guide to Combing: A Safe, Non-toxic Method of Lice Control

Focus your control efforts on combing to eliminate lice.

1. Getting ready--You will need:

- fine-toothed comb designed for nit removal. A metal comb is less flexible than plastic ones and may be more effective at removing nits.
- bobby pins or hair clips (for long hair)
- a large towel to place around the child's shoulders during combing
- box of facial tissue
- wide bowl of water with a squirt of dishwashing liquid



Figure 4. When combing, hold the mass of hair with one hand. With the other hand, hold the lice comb in a slanting position with the teeth toward the head.

Note: Combing should be done in a well-lighted area. Seat the child so her/his head is just below eye level. It might be a good idea to have something fun to entertain the child that does not require much physical activity. Consider reading, modeling clay, coloring or games/videos/dvd.

2. Preparing the hair--Cover the hair with any type of salad oil or conditioner to keep the hair wet so combing is easier. Remove tangles with a regular hair comb.

3. Combing--Separate a mass of hair about the width of the metal lice comb. It is important to separate the hair into small sections so you can more easily see lice and nits. Hold the mass of hair with one hand. Insert the lice comb as close to the scalp as possible and gently pull the comb slowly through the hair several times. Check the hair carefully. Comb one section at a time and check each section again (Figure 4). Pin the hair in a curl flat against the head. Dip the comb in the soapy water and use the tissue to remove lice and debris. Make sure the comb is clean before you use it on the hair again. Continue combing.

4. Cleaning Up--Flush the contents of the bowl down the toilet. Shampoo the hair at least twice to remove the oil. When the hair is dry, check for stray nits and remove those hairs individually with a pair of small, pointed scissors.

It is VERY important to remove all of the eggs (nits). Soak the lice comb for 15 minutes in hot ammonia water (1 tsp ammonia to 2 cups hot water). Or, boil the metal comb in plain water for 15 minutes. Use an old toothbrush to clean the comb. The comb can now be used on another family member.