

Time for some nit-busting and myth-busting too! Think you know your nits? **Richard Jones**, author and guest blogger, explodes the top ten myths about head lice ...

Head lice are dirty.

Wrong. Head lice do just fine in clean hair thank you very much. Washing hair once a week, or once a year, makes no difference.

Men don't get head lice because of testosterone.

Wrong. If men get head lice less often, it's because they cuddle their children less. It's a sad indictment of our aloof male stiff-upper-lip Britishness. We'd rather shake hands with our kids.

Afro-Caribbean children don't get head lice.

Wrong. Head lice have tormented humans on every continent, in every era. As one Victorian textbook put it: "No human race is without lice, or immune to them".

Girls get head lice more often than boys because of their long hair.

Wrong. Boys did not get more head lice back in the hippy 1960s or mullet-topped 1970s. Girls tend to get head lice more often because they do more head-to-head huddling and cuddling, but boys still get lice.

Blondes do not get head lice because they cannot grip the fine hair strands.

Wrong. Blonde, brunette, ginger, black, grey or blue rinse, we can all get head lice. Baldness is the only state likely to be free of lice.



"So, do you come here often?"

You can easily get head lice from hats, scarves, combs and headphones.

Wrong. A head louse removed from the scalp is dead within hours. Head lice are small and soft and vulnerable. If one lets go of a hair it would get squashed, or it would get lost. Letting go of the hair is suicide for a louse.

Vinegar removes nits (louse eggs)

Wrong. It is now scientifically proved that acetic acid has absolutely no effect at nit-loosening; proprietary nit-loosening shampoos are equally useless. At least vinegar tastes good on chips.

Combing is old-fashioned.

Wrong. Combing is cheap, it's easy, and it's effective. Combing works. It is only old-fashioned in the way that eating, drinking, breathing and sleeping is old-fashioned. In fact, combing is the future.

All you need is a louse-killing shampoo.

Wrong. We've all been reading too much science fiction. No insecticidal shampoo is 100% effective. They do not kill all head lice. Inevitably, some survive to come back and haunt us. Insecticide-resistance in head lice is now becoming a serious issue.

Head lice hate strong smelling hair oils.

Wrong. Unlike, say, mosquitoes, which do detect their food by scent, head lice do not sniff out their next victim, they feel their way from head to head. Head lice do not fly, they do not jump, they do not skip. They crawl, but they are very good at it.