



Head Lice Don't Be Such a Nit Pick

When children are sent home from school with a case of head lice, or nits as they are sometimes called, parents are often mortified. These pesky pests are parasites that typically infest the scalps of school-age children. A recent review in the *British Medical Journal* dispelled many myths about how to treat head lice.

Lice attach their eggs to hair shafts near the scalp and lay five to six eggs a day. The most up-to-date medical research has shown the following:

- ✦ Head lice are harmless
- ✦ Head lice on clothing or furniture cannot infect a person
- ✦ Cutting hair or tying it back is not helpful
- ✦ Banning children with nits from school is ineffective

There is no evidence to support that cleaning sheets and clothing of those infected with lice or treating furniture with insecticide sprays will get rid of the parasites, said Beth Nash, physician's editor for the *British Medical Journal*. Lice that are visible on chairs, pillows, and hats are dead, sick or elderly, or are cast skins of lice that cannot infect a person.

Many people believe that cutting hair or tying it back will help, but this is actually ineffective and even could increase the infestation. In addition, head lice are probably more common in girls because girls are likely

to have close contacts during play—not because they have longer hair.

Nash also added that banning children with nits from school is not a sensible measure to control the spread. About half of children sent home for head lice do not have them, and many public health experts believe that “no-nits” policies in schools should be abandoned.

The most important information to know about head lice is that they are harmless. If detached from their host, they are vulnerable and effectively dead.

According to researchers, chemical treatments such as malathion, lindane, permethrin and pyrethrins are likely to get rid of the lice. However, treatments that need further study include using herbal preparations and aromatherapy and mechanically removing lice by combing.

Source: *British Medical Journal*, <http://bmj.com>

Sleeping on Back Reduces Fevers and Ear Infections

If your baby experiences frequent ear infections or fevers, the way she sleeps may be the cause. Health professionals have recommended that parents and children's caregivers place infants on their backs to sleep to reduce the incidents of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). However, researchers also have found an additional benefit.

“Placing infants to sleep on their backs ... also appears to reduce the risk for fever, stuffy nose and ear infections (otitis media),” said Duane Alexander, M.D., director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

In a recent study published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, researchers found that at 1 month of age, infants sleeping on their backs were less likely to have fevers than infants sleeping on their stomachs. At 6 months, those placed on their backs to sleep were less likely to develop a stuffy nose than those who slept on their stomachs.

At 3 and 6 months of age, back sleepers visited the doctor less often for ear infections than stomach sleepers.

Researchers are not certain why babies who sleep on their backs had fewer symptoms than those that sleep on their stomachs, but one theory is that babies put to sleep on their stomachs have higher mouth and throat temperatures than those who sleep on their backs. These higher temperatures may help promote the growth of the bacteria that causes colds and otitis media.

Source: National Institutes of Health, www.nih.gov

