**HEAD LICE**

I'm here to give you the lowdown on those creepy crawlies in your kid’s hair that all parents dread. Yes I'm talking head lice and it feels like they are taking over. There are myths, old wives tails and out dated information along with the wall of lice eradication products you are faced with every time you get the dreaded lice note.

Being a parent and a hairdresser, I have done my research and have sorted the good from the bad and the new from the old. Here are my findings. Enjoy!

Head lice are tiny insect parasites that survive on skin and blood. They travel from head to head by their claw like legs. This usually occurs via close contact. Hugging, wrestling, taking a speckie and falling on top of each other in a footy game, measuring our height against someone else or staring into each other’s eyes. These are all things our kids do daily and are simple ways lice transfer from head to head. There is no way we can prevent our kids from doing these activities, hence the speed of infestation among Primary aged children. Due to popular belief, lice cannot jump (their legs are too stumpy to do this) and they cannot fly (they do not have wings). It is also less likely to be infested from shared combs, hats or pillowcases as lice rarely leave their food source. In saying this, it is still recommended to wash these items for unhatched eggs. By the way, no need to do all the bed linen, just the pillowcase. Remember the eggs can’t crawl.

Treating head lice does not have to be a complicated process and if treated correctly it should only need to be done 2 or 3 times per contamination. Your choice of product comes down to your beliefs and what ingredients you chose to put on your child’s head. The 4 active ingredients you will be faced with are
- pyrethrin
- synthetic pyrethrins (permethrin, bioallethrin)
- organophosphate ( maldison, malathion)
- herbal (with or without natural pyrethrins)

Hair conditioner is not considered a product that will kill head lice. Conditioner will slow the lice down so you can see them and is a great way to spot lice using the conditioner and comb technique if you are unsure. If you choose to use the conditioner only method as a chemical free option then the conditioner/ lice comb technique must be done every second day for 10 days until there is no sign of eggs. There is also no research that has found that Tea tree oil and eucalyptus are effective ways of killing head lice. Due to their strong smell I think their effectiveness is more psychological than fact.

That leaves us with all the other products (containing one of the above active ingredients), the chemical option as some would say. They all work in similar ways. Usually left on the hair for 10 min then rinsed out. They also vary greatly in price. The product I have found that works best is Pyrenel foam which is available at Leo’s Supermarket in Heidelberg for about $7. I wet down the hair, put it on and leave for 10 min. I then wet the hair again and apply conditioner and comb through section by section to remove both lice and eggs. This doesn't take that long and I usually give my kids an iPad to distract them. I then wipe the
conditioner residue onto a tissue and make sure the lice are dead. If at this stage the lice are not dead or dying then you need to change product. This is rare but usually means the lice are immune to that certain product. This can happen with some of the more commercial products or the active ingredients have been watered down by all the other ingredients. This step can usually be done 2 or 3 times over 10 days and the lice and eggs will all be gone. I find this is the quickest and easiest way for time poor parents to take control of these crawling critters. Once your child has been treated after the first time in this way, they are free to go back to school the next day. Just make sure you continue this another couple of times over the next 10 days.

Just remember, if your child contracts head lice, it doesn't have to be a disaster. Anyone can contract head lice. They do not carry disease and are not a sign of poor hygiene (they actually prefer clean hair). Follow the steps above and remember if your product does not work, then change it.

The best tips in preventing head lice is to tie up your daughter's hair and putting product in your son's hair. Hairspray is another easy option as the lice find it harder to cling onto hair with product in it and it makes life harder to get to their food source, the scalp. This is why hairdressers rarely contract head lice.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments or just tips of your own so we can share them with other parents. You can email me at leasa@birdiehairandbeauty.com.au or send a message via the office.

Good luck and if we all work together then we make the problem smaller.
Leasa (mum to Damon 3JB and Lucas 2MV)