

Alternative Methods

ALTERNATIVE OR NATURAL METHODS

Several products are marketed as alternative or natural methods of treatment. A number of shampoos and rinses contain herbs, oils, or enzymes believed to aid in lice removal. The majority of alternative or natural products are suffocants or enzymes.

Natural or herbal products are not required to meet FDA efficacy and safety standards. These products do not have licenses for the treatment of head lice, and in some cases, have little or no data to support their effectiveness. Although natural products are often perceived as being intrinsically safe, **the State of Michigan cannot recommend these treatments without further evidence of their effectiveness.** Please contact the health department or your health care provider to make sure there are no potential health consequences of alternative or natural methods.

Suffocants – petroleum jelly, mayonnaise, plant-based oils, or Cetaphil®

- Suffocants can obstruct the respiration of adult lice as well as suffocate lice eggs by blocking efficient air exchange.
- For all products except Cetaphil®, the product is massaged on the entire surface of the hair and scalp, covered with a shower cap, and left on for at least eight hours (See “*Safety and Precautions*”). The suffocant can then be used as a lubricant to aid in nit removal by combing.
- Cetaphil® is massaged on the entire surface of the hair and scalp, the excess product is combed out, hair is dried with a hair dryer, and the hair is washed eight hours or more later.*
- Diligent shampooing is usually necessary for at least the next 7 to 10 days to remove the residue.
- To date, little scientifically published information is available on the effectiveness of these methods.

Enzymes – LiceLogic, Lice B Gone, Lice R Gone

- Treatment products containing “enzymes” claim to dissolve or soften the glue that attaches the nit to the hair shaft, thereby providing easier removal of lice and nits when combing. To date, only subjective information is available on their effectiveness.

Desiccation (Heat Treatment) – LouseBuster, hair dryers, etc.

- The LouseBuster is a custom-built machine that uses one 30-minute application of hot air in an attempt to dehydrate active lice and their eggs.
- One study has shown that subjects had nearly 100 percent mortality of eggs and 80 percent mortality of hatched lice.
- The LouseBuster is expensive and requires training in its use. Some businesses offer convenient heat treatments for a fee (normally not covered by insurance).
- A home hair dryer should not be used in the same way. Studies have also shown that using home hair dryers, commercial (salon) dryers, and drying bonnets are not as effective as the steady and diffused heat offered by professional product.

Other Substances



Flammable or toxic substances, such as gasoline or kerosene, **should never be used.** Products intended for animal use (e.g., flea collars or topical insecticides) **should never be used** to treat head lice in humans.

*Pearlman, DL (2004). A simple treatment for head lice: Dry-on, suffocation-based pediculicide, *Pediatrics*, 114 (3): 275-279.