



By Gwen Sampson

Welcome to the first in a series of columns on something that matters to all of us - the health and well-being of ourselves and those we love. The information in this column is not meant to take the place of medical advice from a qualified medical practitioner. Rather, the goal is to raise awareness and highlight topics that impact you as residents of Stouffville. Hopefully there will be answers to your health concerns as well as questions and controversy over different topics. Will this column be the definitive authority on a subject? Likely not, but it will serve as a springboard from which you can consider options, interventions and the nature of living a healthy life. But first a word of advice: Beware the Internet!

Your Health Matters

A STOUFFVILLE FAMILY DOCTOR ADDRESSES MEDICAL CONCERNS AND ISSUES AFFECTING LOCAL RESIDENTS

WHAT THE FALL BRINGS

While the fall brings with it cooler nights for sleeping and glorious colours, it also marks the back to school march, the need to check the "To Do" list for your children's school supplies and cool weather clothing - and the dreaded head checks. Yes, I mean lice. It is a ritual. I would say almost a rite of passage. There is a well-intentioned rumour out there that lice prefer people with clean hair as opposed to those with dirty hair. Maybe that serves as a comfort to the clean hair troops who need to justify the infestation. I have been a parent and physician long enough to have seen some fairly grotty crawlers on both the cleanest and dirtiest of heads. Lice spare no one and have no favourites whether it be a washed head or foreign country. A friend of ours who grew up in Egypt used to have a pet monkey that sat on his shoulder picking the tiny bugs from his hair. While we might think we have it bad with snow days, a Texan colleague we know routinely has school closures due to "Lice" days.

In our neck of the woods, the head checks commence in mid October each year. It is every parent's nightmare come true when they get that call to pick up little Johnny from school because he has "Pediculosis" - tiny wingless parasitic insects feeding on his scalp. Hideous but accurate.

Let me share some facts with you about these annoying creatures. They are annoying, that's it. If you and your children have ever had lice, you still are good Stouffville citizens who don't need to go into hiding. We tell our friends that we have lice so that they may check their own kid's heads. That's being responsible but oddly enough we share it in a whisper because somehow we feel ashamed.

Let's get the facts straight so we can move past unnecessary humiliation and deal with lice fearlessly. I've

summarized an excellent handout distributed by the York Regional Public Health Dept. re Pediculosis. Check out www.york.ca for more information.

The Facts Of Lice

- Lice can exist as a nit (egg), a nymph (immature louse) or an adult. The egg is half the size of a pin and looks like a teardrop. The nymph is transparent or rust coloured and has six clawed legs that hang onto hair. The adult lays up to 150 eggs and crawls from head to head.
- Lice cause itching. Check your child if you see them scratching their head. Look at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. Check for small sores from scratching.
- Treatment can be chemical or alternative. Your pharmacist can help with the choice. Whichever treatment you choose, be sure to regularly check your child's head as freshly laid nits do not absorb many treatments.
- Lice spread by contact so discourage any sharing of personal items such as hats. Wash bedding, towels and hats in hot water or keep them in airtight bags for 10 days if they cannot be washed.

This article is for information purposes only. Gwen Sampson has been a family doctor in Stouffville since 1989. To suggest topics, contact gs@yourhealthmatters@gmail.com

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Plastic Palette

Chai Duncan of the Latcham Gallery poses with Katherine Harvey in front of her creation consisting entirely of plastic product wrappings and containers at the opening reception of Waves of Light featuring the works of the internationally recognized York Region artist. The exhibition, which is on display through November 7, includes lush acrylic paintings and site specific sculpture by Ms. Harvey. Bruce Stapley photo

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