

Phthiriasis Palpebrarum: Dermoscopy to Rescue

Phthiriasis palpebrarum, an infestation of the eyelashes by pubic lice (*Phthirus pubis*), is an infrequent and often overlooked cause of blepharitis. *Phthirus pubis*, a hematophagous arthropod and an obligate parasite of human beings mainly inhabits the pubic area.^[1] However, spread to armpits, beard, eyebrows, and eyelashes is sometimes seen. Involvement of eyelashes in children is frequent due to the absence of terminal hair elsewhere and caregivers are the usual source of transmission.^[2] Failure to recognize the crab lice results in erroneous diagnosis and failed treatment. Lighter skin color, small body, and less mobility of the crab louse make it less discernible to the naked eye, further, it burrows deep into the lid margin evading identification on clinical examination.^[3] Dermoscopy is an excellent tool to identify adult louse and nits with great ease.

A 6-year-old boy presented with complaints of persistent itching and redness of both eyelids for the past three weeks. Her parents noted occasional rubbing of his eyes and mild swelling of the eyelids. There was no personal or family history of atopy or eye drop application. On examination, eyelashes were covered with whitish granules [Figure 1]. Dermoscopy revealed the presence of



Figure 1: Whitish flakes and granules adherent to eyelashes

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multiple translucent nits (arrows) with white operculum attached onto the hair shaft [Figure 2a]. With the diagnosis of phthiriasis palpebrarum, he was prescribed a single dose of oral ivermectin 4mg, and manual removal of nits. The patient and his family were educated about personal hygiene measures and the prevention of re-infestation.

Dermoscopic examination played a pivotal role in identifying characteristic findings of adult lice attached to the eyelashes and their nits (eggs) in this case, where the initial diagnosis suspected was blepharitis associated with seborrheic dermatitis or atopic dermatitis. Dermoscopy allows for the differentiation of lice and nits from other debris and pseudo-nits, ensuring accurate diagnosis and prompt management. On dermoscopy, the adult crab louse appears light brown or grey having six legs and clutching onto the hair shaft. The nits are oval and translucent attached to the hair shaft. Considering the difficulty in finding



Figure 2: (a), Dermoscopy (DermLite DL4, 10x magnification, polarized mode) revealed the presence of multiple translucent nits (arrows) with white operculum. (b) Whitish scales along the eyelid margin with few loosely adherent scales along the eyelashes seen in a case of seborrheic dermatitis

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**Dinesh K. Devaraj,
Rashmi Jindal¹**

Consultant Dermatologist,
Dr Dinesh's Skin and Hair
Clinic, Chennai, Tamil Nadu,
¹Department of Dermatology,
Venereology and Leprosy,
Himalayan Institute of
Medical Sciences, Swami
Rama Himalayan University,
Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Rashmi Jindal,
Department of Dermatology,
Venereology and Leprosy,
Himalayan Institute of Medical
Sciences, Swami Ram Nagar,
Doiwala, Dehradun - 248 140,
Uttarakhand, India.
E-mail: rashmijindal98@gmail.
com

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the adult louse, the cornerstone of diagnosis remains the identification of nits. In seborrheic blepharitis, there are greasy white scales predominantly along the eyelid margins with eyelashes having loosely attached scales [Figure 2b]. Hair cast or flakes appear as bizarre shaped amorphous white structures, not adherent to the hair shaft.^[3]

Thus, phthiriasis palpebrarum is an uncommon condition in children but should be considered in cases of unexplained eyelid itching and irritation. Dermoscopy proves invaluable in the rapid and accurate diagnosis of this infestation, guiding appropriate treatment and minimizing discomfort and potential complications for pediatric patients. Awareness among healthcare providers is crucial for the timely recognition and management of this unusual parasitic infection.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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