

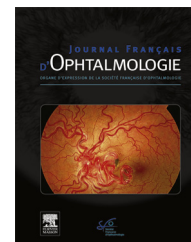


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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Phthiriasis palpebrarum: Diagnosis and treatment[☆]



La phthiriasse palpébrale : diagnostic et traitement

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Phthiriasis
palpebrarum;
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Summary

Introduction. — Phthiriasis palpebrarum is an ectoparasitosis in which *Phthirus pubis* infest the eyelashes. It is rare and it can easily be misdiagnosed as blepharitis. The purpose of this study is to describe seven cases of phthiriasis palpebrarum so as to discuss its mode of infestation, diagnosis and treatment.

Patients and methods. — This is a study of all cases of phthiriasis palpebrarum reported in our laboratory. For each patient, an ophthalmic examination and parasitological examination of the eyelashes were performed.

Results. — There were five men and two women. Their ages ranged from 4 to 50 years with an average of 21.57 years. There were four children and three adults. The main symptom was itching of the eyelids. Clinical signs included reddish-brown crusts at the base of the eyelashes in all the cases and visible lice and nits in three cases. Biomicroscopic examination showed lice and nits anchored to the eyelashes in three cases. In the other two cases, the initial diagnosis was felt to be blepharitis. In all cases, the diagnosis of phthiriasis palpebrarum was confirmed by parasitological examination of eyelashes, which revealed the presence of adult and nit forms of *Phthirus pubis*. The number of adult lice ranged from 1 to 30. In all cases, treatment was based on mechanical removal of both the lice and nits. Outcomes were favorable without recurrence.

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MOTS CLÉS

Phthiriasse
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Phthirus pubis ;
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Conclusion. — In conclusion, phthiriasis palpebrarum can be easily diagnosed by close examination of the eyelashes and eyelid margins at the slit lamp and can be managed mechanically. Parasitological examination of the eyelashes can confirm the diagnosis.

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Résumé

Introduction. — La phthiriasse palpébrale est une ectoparasitose au cours de laquelle *Phthirus pubis* infeste les cils. Elle est rare et peut être confondue avec une blépharite. L'objectif de cette étude est de décrire sept cas de phthiriasse palpébrale afin de discuter son mode d'infestation et ses modalités diagnostiques et thérapeutiques.

Patients et méthodes. — Nous rapportons dans cette étude tous les cas de phthiriasse palpébrale diagnostiqués dans notre laboratoire. Pour chaque patient, un examen ophtalmologique et un examen parasitologique des cils ont été effectués.

Résultats. — Il s'agissait de cinq hommes et deux femmes dont quatre enfants et trois adultes. L'âge moyen était de 21,57 ans avec des extrêmes allant de 4 à 50 ans. Le principal symptôme était un prurit palpébral. Les signes cliniques ont été représentés par la présence de petites croûtes brunâtres à la base des cils dans tous les cas, associées à des poux et des lentes visibles dans trois cas. L'examen à la lampe à fente a révélé la présence des lentes et des adultes de poux attachés aux cils dans trois cas. Le diagnostic initial était celui de blépharite dans deux cas. L'examen parasitologique des cils a révélé la présence des lentes et des adultes de *Phthirus pubis* permettant de poser le diagnostic de phthiriasse ciliaire dans l'ensemble des cas. Le nombre des adultes variait de 1 à 30. Le traitement des malades reposait dans tous les cas sur l'extraction mécanique des adultes et des lentes. L'évolution a été favorable sans récurrence.

Conclusion. — En conclusion, la phthiriasse palpébrale peut être diagnostiquée facilement par un examen minutieux des cils à la lampe à fente. L'examen parasitologique des cils confirmera le diagnostic.

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Introduction

Phthiriasis palpebrarum is a rare eyelid infestation caused by the ectoparasite, *Phthirus pubis*. It is a hematophagous arthropod, belonging to the order of Anoplourea, the family of Pediculidae and the genus *Phthirus* [1–3]. The occurrence of phthiriasis palpebrarum in different parts of the world has been described by different authors [2–8]. However, most of the studies have reported one to two cases. Since the infestation of the eyelashes by pubic lice is rare, it might well be misdiagnosed. Hence, we describe seven cases of phthiriasis palpebrarum to discuss its mode of infestation, diagnosis and treatment.

Clinical cases

There were five men and two women. Their ages ranged from 4 to 50 years with a mean age of 21.57 years. There were four children and three adults. Initial diagnosis was considered to be blepharitis in two cases. The main symptom was itching of the eyelids. Palpebral involvement was unilateral in four cases and bilateral in three cases. On examination, there were many brownish scales on the upper eyelashes in all cases, which correspond to louse faeces. Visible lice and nits were noted in three cases (Figs. 1a and b). Slit lamp examination revealed many lice attached to the base of the upper eyelashes with numerous nits (Fig. 2). Some of the adults and nits were removed and examined under the light microscope. The diagnosis of phthiriasis palpebrarum

was confirmed by parasitological examination of eyelashes, which has revealed the presence of adults and nits of *P. pubis* (Figs. 3a and b and Figs. 4a and b). The number of adult lice ranged from 1 to 30. *P. pubis* was noted in two adults. In all cases, the treatment of phthiriasis palpebrarum was performed by mechanical removal of both the lice and nits. Sedation was necessary in the children. *P. pubis* was treated with permethrine lotion with a single overnight application and this was repeated after one week. In all cases, there was a complete cure of phthiriasis without any recurrence.

Discussion

Three varieties of lice attack humans. They are *Pediculus humanus capitis* (head louse), which is typically found in scalp hair, *Pediculus humanus corporis* (body louse), which infests the seams of clothing, and *P. pubis* (pubic or crab louse), which mainly lives on the hair of pubic and inguinal regions [1,3,9]. Although these regions are the main habitat of *P. pubis*, it can also infest hairs of axilla, chest or rectal regions and rarely, the eyebrows and eyelashes.

In adults, *P. pubis* principally reaches the eyelashes by transmission through hands from pubic hair to eye. It was probably the mode of transmission in our adults because there was associated infestation of pubic hair with the same parasite in two cases. *P. pubis* is a sexually transmitted infection as phthiriasis palpebrarum. It is usually transmitted by sexual contact, but may be transferred sometimes from bedding. Indeed, *P. pubis* moves only very short dis-

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