

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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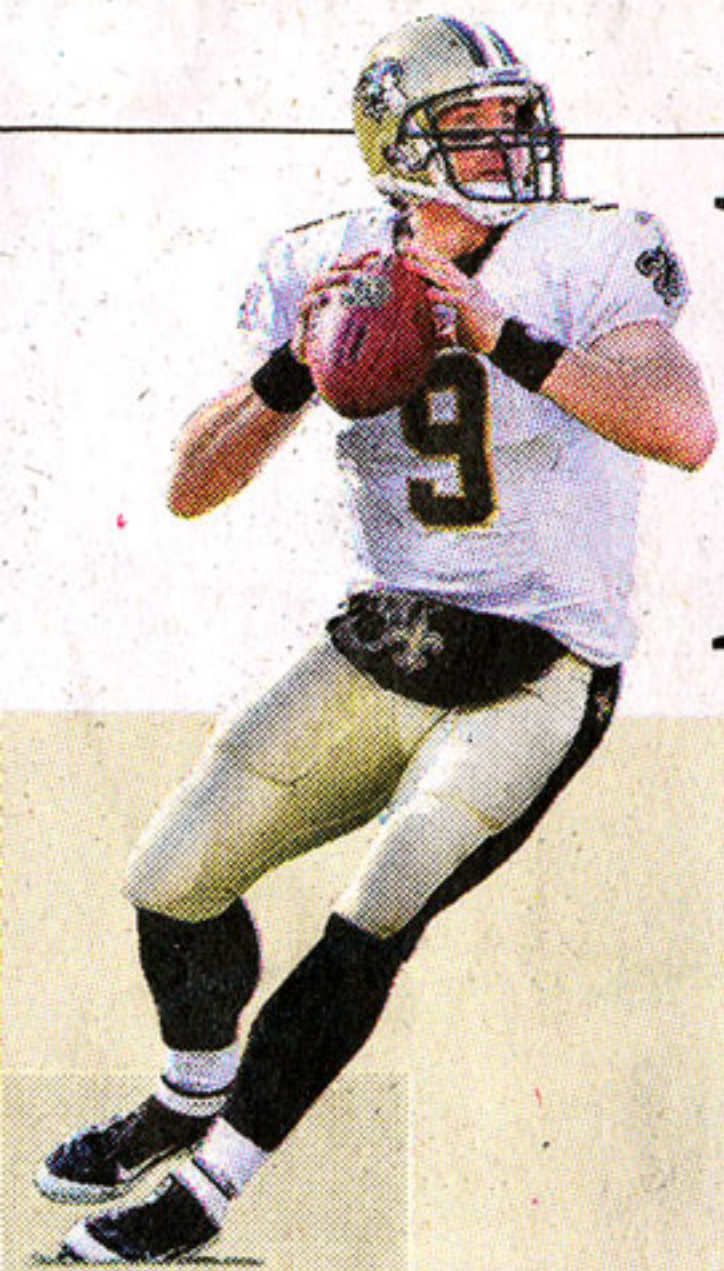
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Parents' Latest Pick: Herbal Shampoos to Keep Away Lice

By TIMOTHY W. MARTIN

How miserable is combing a child's hair, lock by lock, to pick off head lice? So miserable that some parents are buying \$30 shampoos and other washes that promise to ward off the tiny, grayish bugs.

The parents get peace of mind that they are doing something. Conveniently for the product makers, there's no way to tell if they kept lice at bay, or if children wouldn't have gotten lice anyway. Makers say sales are growing fast.

No one tracks the number of head-lice infestations nationwide. The most recent estimate by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 1997, says six million to 12 million children ages 3 to 12 get lice each year, though some experts say the incidence rate is much lower. Still, most U.S. school districts report at least one head-lice case a year.

Jennifer Crocker is worried her two daughters, ages 7 and 11, could get head lice. Three classes at their elementary school have reported outbreaks of the tiny critters so far this school year. A friend's daughter has already gotten them twice.

So Ms. Crocker, a 42-year-old, stay-at home mother from Oakville,



The head louse, above, prefers a clean scalp and only spreads by head-to-head contact. Some 'super lice' have evolved to resist chemical treatments to kill them.

Wash., makes sure her daughters' hair gets lathered every other day with Rosemary Repel shampoo and conditioner, which maker Fairy Tales Hair Care Inc. claims prevents the bugs from nestling onto kids' heads.

"My kids are bug-free" after three years of shampooing and conditioning, she says.

Contrary to popular belief, head lice like clean, not dirty, scalps. The wingless bugs can't hop, jump or fly—they can only crawl. They spread solely by direct head-to-head contact.

They don't harm children, but they are awfully itchy.

When kids do get lice, beating off the infestation isn't easy. So-called super lice have grown resistant to the chemicals in traditional treatments. Parents may use over-the-counter shampoos or creams, prescription treatments containing pesticides, or visit salons that comb hair and pick out the nits.

Sales of prescription lice treatments—used once the bugs have taken hold—rose to \$73.8 million last

year, up 15% from 2006, according to research firm IMS Health Inc. Sales of over-the-counter lice treatments—which include preventive and removal products—grew 11% over the past five years to \$78.9 million for the year ended Nov. 27, according to Chicago-based market researcher SymphonyIRI Group, whose figures don't include Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

Fairy Tales Hair Care sells shampoos, conditioners and bottled lice repellent sprays through its website and at beauty retailers and hair salons. The company, based in Passaic, N.J., says ingredients such as rosemary, citronella and tea tree oils coat hair follicles, repelling lice.

"Rosemary is really the first line of defense against head lice," says Fairy Tales founder Risa Barash, who launched the company in 1999 out of a salon for children owned by a relative. "It's proven. It's safe."

Ms. Barash cites a 2004 study published in the Israel Medical Association journal.

Babo Botanicals' Rosemary Tea Tree Lice Repel Shampoo (\$15.95) is one of several products promising to fend off lice with rosemary and other organic ingredients.

