



Health Fact Sheet: Threadworms

What is threadworms?

Threadworms are small intestinal parasites that infect the intestines of humans. Also known as pinworm is the most common worm parasite infestation. It is common among small children, although any age group can be infested with the parasite. Transmission is only from human to human and animals can neither catch nor pass threadworms to humans.

Male worms tend to only stay in the intestine, however female worms lay their eggs around sensitive and private areas. Eggs are usually laid at night time when the female worm also secretes an irritant mucous. If a child scratches the very irritated/itchy areas then eggs can stick under fingernails and on fingertips and can be transferred to the mouth where re-infestation can occur. When eggs are swallowed they hatch in the intestine and worms can reproduce once they reach adult size.

Symptoms

- Itching around private areas more intense at night
- Persistent infestation; loss of appetite / severe irritability / weight loss
- Constipation and / or diarrhea

Threadworms do not always produce symptoms therefore all members of the household should be treated.

Diagnosis

Threadworms are difficult to see due to their colour and size. The worms resemble pieces of small white cotton thread, hence their name. Threadworms may be detected at night when they are most active and laying their eggs. Sometimes worms can be seen in faeces.

Usually threadworms only become apparent when a child is constantly itching private areas, especially at night.

Treatment

All household members, including adults and those without symptoms, should be treated. This is because many people with threadworms do not have any symptoms. However, they will still pass out eggs which can then infect other people. If one member of a household is infected, it is common for others also to be infected. So, everyone needs treatment!



The common treatment is:

- To take a medicine to kill the worms in your gut.
- **And**, hygiene measures to clear eggs which may be around your back passage (anus) or in your home.

Note: for babies under the age of three months, only hygiene measures are possible, as no medicine is licensed for this age group.

Hygiene measures

Medication will kill the worms in the gut, but not the eggs that have been laid around the anus. These can survive for up to two weeks outside the body on underwear, bedding, in the dust, etc (as described above). So, hygiene measures aim to clear any eggs from the body and the home, and to prevent any eggs from being swallowed. This will then break the cycle of re-infection. After taking the first dose of medication for threadworms:

- First, as a one off, aim to clear eggs from where they may be in your home. This means:
 - Wash sleepwear, bed linen, towels, and cuddly toys. This can be done at normal temperatures so long as the washing is well rinsed.
 - Vacuum and damp-dust your home. Throw out the cloth after use. Pay particular attention to bedrooms, including vacuuming mattresses, and where children play.
 - Thoroughly clean the bathroom by damp-dusting surfaces, washing the cloth frequently in hot water. Throw out the cloth after use.
- Then, every member of the household should do the following for two weeks:
 - Wear close-fitting underpants or knickers in bed, and change every morning. This is so that if you scratch in your sleep, you will not touch the skin near the anus. (Also, consider wearing cotton gloves at night, as this may also help to prevent scratching with fingernails during the night.)
 - Every morning have a bath, or wash around the anus, to get rid of any eggs laid overnight. You must do this straightaway after getting up from bed.
 - Ideally, change and wash nightwear each day.



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And general hygiene measures which you should always aim to do to prevent getting threadworms again:

- Wash hands and scrub under the nails first thing in the morning, after using the toilet or changing nappies, and before eating or preparing food.
- Try not to bite your nails or suck fingers, and discourage children from doing so.
- If possible, avoid sharing towels or flannels.
- Keep toothbrushes in a closed cupboard. Rinse well before use.