

GIARDIASIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Giardiasis?

Giardia is a diarrheal illness caused by a one-celled microscopic parasite. The parasite lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals and lay eggs that can be released with their bowel movements.

How is it spread?

Giardia is found in soil, food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with feces from infected humans or animals. You can become infected by putting something in your mouth that has come in contact with the feces of an infected person or animal. Giardia can be transmitted by swallowing recreational water contaminated with giardia as well as eating uncooked food contaminated with giardia. Giardia can also be picked up from surfaces such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, changing soiled diapers, or toys contaminated with feces from an infected person. Symptoms of giardia usually begin 1 to 2 weeks (average 7 days) after becoming infected.

How is it treated?

Giardia is diagnosed by checking stool samples for the presence of the parasite or eggs. Several drugs are available to treat giardia and can be prescribed by your health care provider. Since young children and pregnant women are more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea, they should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Stool samples can be checked after completing the prescribed medication to determine if the infection is cleared.

How can we prevent Giardiasis?

- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before eating and preparing food.
- Avoid drinking untreated water from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds or streams.
- Do not swim in recreational water if you have giardia until two weeks after diarrhea stops.
- Wash and/or peel all raw fruits and vegetables before eating. Use uncontaminated water to wash food that is to be eaten raw.
- Prompt and proper treatment will prevent the transmission of giardia to other family members or in day care centers.

SYMPTOMS OF GIARDIASIS

A person with this disease may have:

- frequent, loose and pale greasy stools
- abdominal cramps
- a lot of gas (bloating)
- fatigue
- lack of appetite
- weight loss
- symptoms that come and go
- some people may have the disease with no signs at all (asymptomatic)

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