



# Southeast Georgia PEDIATRICS

E. Wynn Kallay II MD • Dannette Brantley Kallay MD  
1701 D Boulevard Sq • Waycross, GA 31501 • 912-387-0445

## Pinworm (Threadworm, Seatworm) Infection (Enterobiasis)



### General Information

The pinworm is a very common parasite, found throughout the world in all classes of people. It is thought that one in five children in this country is infected at any given time. In fact, because these worms are so common, some experts believe that they should be considered normal inhabitants of the intestinal tract of children.

Adult worms look like a tiny piece of white thread, about the thickness of dental floss, from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long. They live in the lower bowel but migrate, usually at night, to the skin around the anus where the female lays her eggs. Irritation from the sticky covering of the eggs causes itching. When the child scratches he or she picks up the eggs on the hands and under the nails. Eventually, the fingers go into the mouth, the eggs are swallowed, hatch in the upper portion of the bowel and—in about 2 weeks time—become adult worms, starting the cycle all over again.

Eggs are passed from child to child via fingers and hands or on shared toys, bedding, clothing, toilet seats, etc. Because the eggs are very light and float in the air, they can also be breathed in and swallowed.

Symptoms usually begin 2 to 4 weeks later.



### The Illness

Children who have pinworms are frequently not aware that they are infected. The only evidence is the discovery of worms around the anus.

Itching with redness and irritation of the skin around the anus and on the buttocks are common. In most cases the itch is only slight; rarely is it intense. Restless sleep and frequent awakening at night can occur in the more severe cases.

Pinworms sometimes lose their way in girls and accidentally crawl into the vagina or into the opening leading to the bladder (urethra). This can cause vaginal irritation with itching and discharge or, less often, pain on urination.

If young children could be prevented from putting their fingers in their mouth and reinfesting themselves, symptoms would theoretically last for only 2 or 3 weeks. However, this is almost impossible, and untreated infections can continue indefinitely.



### When To Call Your Doctor

You should call our office if you are frightened or worried about your child's infection.

Call us during regular office hours if: you think your child has worms again; you detect signs of infection in other children or adults living in your household.



### Treatment

Several medications are available for the treatment of pinworm infection. Because none destroys the eggs a second course of treatment is needed 2 weeks after the first to kill any worms that hatched in the interval. Treatment is very effective; if worms reappear it is far more likely a reinfection than failure of the medication. If your doctor suspects that others in the household are infected, he or she may prescribe medicine for the entire family.

Your child's clothing, bedding and towels should be laundered in hot water on the first day medication is taken.

Severe rectal itching or pain can be relieved by sitting in a tub or cleansing the area around the anus with witch hazel or some other soothing solution several times a day. Applying a light coat of 0.5% hydrocortisone cream to the irritated skin can also provide comfort.

There is no reason to change your child's diet or activities.

Pinworm infection is so common among children that preventing spread is virtually impossible. Ordinary house cleaning together with good handwashing after using the toilet and keeping fingernails clean and short are reasonable control measures.

Sterilizing toys, using disinfectants on furniture surfaces or extensive laundering of curtains, rugs and upholstery are of no proven value.



Contagion



Return to  
Group  
Activities



Common  
Concerns

*As long as children play together, pinworms will spread. There is no reason to believe that you could have prevented this infection or that it occurred because your child's home, school or friends are "dirty."*

If you think your child has become reinfected, use a flashlight to look for worms around the anus a few hours after he or she goes to bed. If none are seen, ask your doctor for a test to check for eggs.

Pinworms do not cause stomach aches, poor appetite, poor weight gain, anemia (low blood), unusual tiredness, hyperactivity or tooth-grinding.

These worms infect only humans (and some apes). Cats, dogs, rabbits, rodents or other pets cannot spread the infection.

Adults sometimes catch pinworms from children. If you feel you might be infected, call your doctor.



Recheck  
Appointment

Make an appointment to be seen in \_\_\_\_\_ days.

Not necessary \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Further  
Advice from  
Your Doctor

Author: Michael Katz, M.D. Carpentier Professor of Pediatrics; Chairman, Department of Pediatrics, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons; New York, NY

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