

## **Threadworms - about worms**

Threadworms are small intestinal parasites that infect the intestines of humans. The worms are white, with a blunt head and a pointed tail. They can live for up to six weeks.

The female worm lays many tiny eggs around the anus. This usually happens at night while you are asleep, as the female worms only come out at night. While laying the eggs, the worm also produces an itchy chemical, which causes the person to scratch the area. Eggs then stick under fingernails and on fingertips, and can be transferred to the mouth where they can cause re-infestation.

The swallowed eggs hatch in the intestine and after a couple of weeks the worms reach adult size and begin to reproduce.

You cannot catch threadworms from animals. The only way animals may be responsible for spreading human threadworms is by transporting them on their fur as a result of human contact.

Treatment for threadworms is aimed at getting rid of the parasites and preventing re-infestation. To successfully treat threadworms you can either follow strict hygiene methods (described below), or see your GP who can prescribe medicine for you.

When taking medicine, you should also ensure strict hygiene methods are taken to prevent re-infestation.

### **Looking after yourself - Hygiene**

Thorough hygiene measures can be used to clear up threadworms, and to lower your chances of re-infestation. The life span of a threadworm is approximately 6 weeks, so these hygiene methods should be followed for this period and if no eggs are swallowed no new worms will replace them.

Hygiene measures alone may be considered when drug treatment is not wanted or is not recommended.

This hygiene advice should be followed to treat threadworm infestation:

- Keep your fingernails short.

- Do not bite your nails or put your fingers in your mouth.
- Wash your hands frequently and scrub under your fingernails, particularly before eating and after visiting the toilet.
- Wear close-fitting underwear at night to help prevent scratching.
- Change and wash underwear, nightwear and (if possible) bed linen each day (avoid shaking them as this also spreads eggs).
- Wearing cotton gloves at night may help prevent scratching during sleep.
- Have a bath or shower each morning and make sure that you clean around your anus to remove any worm eggs laid during the night.
- All members of the family or household need to follow these hygiene instructions, even if they do not show signs of having worms.

### **Medicines**

This advice is suitable for those who prefer to use medicine to treat worm infestation:

- Purchase over the counter (OTC) medicines from your nearest pharmacy. These are also available on prescription from your GP.
- All members of the family or household need to be treated at the same time, to avoid re-infestation, even if they do not show symptoms.
- The general hygiene measures described above still need to be followed until the infestation has cleared. The pharmacist can advise on how long this is likely to take.

### **Consider others**

To prevent the risk of spreading the infection:

- Make sure everyone in your house has their own face flannel and towel. Avoid sharing towels.
- Don't eat food in the bedroom as eggs can be shaken off bedclothes and survive in dust.
- Vacuum regularly and thoroughly.

*Information gained from the NHS Direct website 05-03-13*