



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Threadworms

(also known as pinworms)

Threadworms are parasites that live in human intestines. They are the most common cause of 'worms' in Australia and infection is very common. Anyone can get threadworm infection, but because of the way it spreads, children are more susceptible than adults. Threadworm infection can be treated with medicines.

Threadworms look like short pieces of white cotton (about 5-10mm long) that move. They only infect people and threadworm infection spreads when eggs pass from one person to another. Dogs, cats and other animals do not get threadworms or pass them on to people (animals are infected by other types of worms).

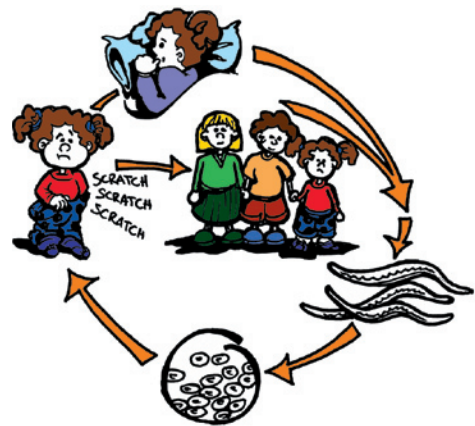
The threadworm cycle

If threadworm eggs are swallowed by a person, they can hatch in the gut. The larvae migrate to the small and large intestines, where they live and mature. Within 2-4 weeks of ingestion, the adult female worm mates and moves down to the anus where she lays thousands of tiny eggs and then dies. This usually happens at night when the person is asleep or relaxed.

The 'glue' that sticks the eggs to the anus causes skin irritation, which leads the infected person to scratch the area. The eggs stick to fingers and under fingernails and are easily transferred to the mouth, to food, or to other people. Bedclothes, underwear, towels, toys, furniture, floors (especially around toilets) and other places in the home can have threadworm eggs on them. The eggs can survive outside a human body for several weeks.

Signs and symptoms

- Sometimes none.
- Itching around the anus or vagina, especially at night.
- Threadworms moving on the outside of a bowel motion or around the anus, especially at night or first thing in the morning.
- Restless sleep – sometimes resulting in bedwetting.



- Feeling irritable or mildly unwell.
- Reduced appetite, stomach pain.

Although uncomfortable, threadworms do not cause major health problems.

Finding threadworms

- Look for worms on the outside surface of bowel motions. Do not mistake mucous, fluff or thread for threadworms – look for movement.
- Look for worms moving around the outside of the anus at night (often about an hour after going to sleep) or first thing in the morning.
- In the morning before bathing, briefly press a piece of sticky tape over the anus. Any eggs will stick to the tape. Ask a doctor to have the tape examined under a microscope.

Medicines

Medicines for threadworms are available from a pharmacist without a prescription.

- Treat everyone living in the same house with the infected person, whether or not they have symptoms. The medicine should be given to everyone at the same time. Follow the dose instructions on the pack.
- Ask a pharmacist or doctor about treating pregnant women, breastfeeding women and children under two years of age.
- Shower on the night the medicine is given, and again the next morning to remove eggs laid during the night.
- Apply protective ointment (e.g., nappy rash cream) to the anal area at bedtime to help stop scratching. Take care not to infect the ointment remaining in the container.
- A second dose of the worm medicine may be needed two or three weeks later, to catch any eggs/worms that survived the first dose. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

Important

If someone in the household has worms:

- The infection will continue until it is correctly treated
- Every member of the household should take a dose of worm medicine
- If recommended by your pharmacist or doctor, every member of the household should take a second dose of worm medicine two or three weeks later
- Wash bedding and towels and clean house to remove threadworm eggs
- Worm medicine does not prevent or protect against worm infection
- It is not necessary to worm the family when worming the family's pets.

Self care

- Wash (preferably in hot water) and iron bed linen, pyjamas, underwear and towels. The heat of an iron will kill the eggs. Do not shake bed linen indoors as this can spread eggs around.
- Scrub fingernails to remove eggs. Urge children to stop nail biting, finger sucking and scratching their bottom.
- Keep fingernails short and clean.
- Dress children in sleeping suits, mittens or snug underpants to prevent eggs being picked up on fingers or under fingernails when scratching.
- Vacuum furniture, bedrooms and all around the toilet to remove any eggs.
- Encourage everyone to wash their hands when looking after infected children, after using the toilet and changing nappies and before handling food.
- Clean and disinfect the toilet seat regularly.
- It is not necessary to keep a child home from childcare or school once treatment has been given.

Related fact cards

- *Haemorrhoids*

For more information

HEALTH/Insite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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