

What is giardiasis?

Giardia lamblia is a protozoan parasite (a tiny organism) that causes an infection of the digestive system called giardiasis. The parasites are found in the gut of both humans and animals.

Giardiasis can cause diarrhoea, abdominal cramps and flatulence. Sometimes there may be no symptoms at all.

- after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy;
- after contact with pets and other animals;
- after working in the garden.

Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers or streams. Avoid swallowing water when swimming in lakes and swimming pools.

When travelling to countries where standards of water hygiene are poor always drink bottled water. Never add ice to your drinks and don't brush your teeth with tap water.

Always wash and/or peel fruit and vegetables before eating them.

How can you prevent others in your household becoming infected with giardiasis?

Everyone in the household should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after going to the toilet, after handling soiled clothing or bedding and before preparing/eating food.

Wash the infected person's laundry separately and on the hottest cycle of the washing machine for that particular fabric.

Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

Everyone in the house should have their own towel and they should not use anyone else's.

The infected person should not prepare or serve food for others.

Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis, but certain groups are more likely to get the infection:

- young children under five years old;
- people who care for, or work with, children;
- travellers to parts of the world where standards of water hygiene are poor.

How do you get infected with giardiasis?

You can become infected through swimming in, or drinking, contaminated water. This is a particular problem for people travelling to parts of the world where water hygiene is poor.

It is also possible to get giardiasis through contact with someone else who has the illness or contact with their contaminated items (for example when changing a nappy).

How can you avoid getting infected with giardiasis?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- before preparing and eating food;
- after handling raw food;

What are the symptoms of giardiasis and how long do they last?

Common symptoms include watery diarrhoea (which may be foul smelling and explosive), abdominal cramps, nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, flatulence and bloating.

Possible symptoms include loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, vomiting and a mild fever of 37–38°C (98.6–100°F).

Symptoms usually develop within 7–10 days of exposure to the infection. Most cases resolve after 2–3 weeks.

A small number of people can go on to develop long-term (chronic) giardiasis. This can cause prolonged diarrhoea and weight loss; however it is rare among people who are treated for the illness.

How is giardiasis treated?

Giardiasis is one of the few infections of the digestive system that can be successfully treated with antibiotics. It is important to be treated to prevent long-term (chronic) giardiasis developing.

Your GP will be able to prescribe an appropriate antibiotic for you.

During the illness it is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body.

If you feel sick and have difficulty keeping fluids down try taking small sips of fluid frequently. Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks or alcohol. Always dilute sugary drinks even if you would not normally dilute them.

Do you need to see your GP?

Yes. Giardiasis is one of the few infections of the digestive system that can be successfully treated with antibiotics. Your GP will be able to prescribe an appropriate antibiotic for you.

Do you need to stay off work or school?

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You should not return to work or school until you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had giardiasis if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

Children should not attend school/childcare or play with other children until they are fully recovered and symptom free for 48 hours.



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