

GIARDIASIS

NOLENSVILLE FAMILY MEDICINE
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BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An intestinal infection caused by a parasite. Giardiasis is a frequent cause of diarrhea. It may occur in clusters or outbreaks, affecting many persons at a time. It can affect any age, but is more common in young children.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Often, there are no symptoms.
- Symptoms can be mild and recurrent, persisting for months, or longer.
- Sudden diarrhea and stomach cramping. Some persons have only mild diarrhea and upset stomach.
- Stools may have a foul smell and be greasy.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Slight fever (rare).

CAUSES

A parasite, *Giardia lamblia*. The germs may be spread in food or water contaminated by feces from infected animals or humans. Germs can be spread from one person to another due to poor hygiene. Symptoms begin in 1 to 3 weeks after being infected.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Drinking from a water supply that is contaminated.
- Drinking unsafe water while camping or hiking.
- Swimmers who swallow contaminated water.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.
- Children or workers at preschool or daycare center.
- Foreign travel.
- Oral or anal sex.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't drink unsafe water. Boil or treat it first.
- Avoid uncooked foods that may have been rinsed in contaminated water.
- Wash hands often to prevent spread of any germs.
- Keep children with diarrhea away from others.
- To avoid spreading the germs, don't swim if you have diarrhea.
- When traveling in foreign countries, take care to eat food and drink water that is known to be safe.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Complete recovery is expected within 1 to 2 weeks with treatment. Symptoms may go away even without treatment, but a person can carry the germs for weeks or months.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Dehydration.
- Chronic giardiasis.
- Malabsorption (unable to absorb nutrients from food) and weight loss.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider may do a physical exam. Questions will be asked about your symptoms and activities. Health providers are often aware if there is an outbreak of giardiasis in the community. Medical tests may include stool studies to detect the parasites.
- Giardiasis responds well to drugs. Treatment is usually done at home. Drug treatment for family members who are infected, but have no symptoms, may be recommended. Pregnant women may require special treatment.
- Hospital care to replace lost fluids may be required for patients with severe diarrhea and dehydration.
- Prevention is the best treatment. Be cautious when away from normal drinking-water supplies.
- Practice careful personal hygiene if you, or others around you, have diarrhea.

MEDICATIONS

Antiparasitic drugs such as metronidazole (Flagyl) and others may be prescribed. Alcohol interacts with metronidazole to cause stomach cramps and nausea, so don't drink alcohol during this treatment.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

- Maintain an adequate fluid intake (at least 8 glasses of water or liquid a day).
- Some persons develop lactose intolerance. A lactose-free diet may be recommended.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of giardiasis.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page