

# THREADWORM

## A guide to detection, prevention & cure



### What are threadworms?

Threadworms are small worms (about 1 cm in length) They are white in colour and look like threads of cotton. The worms enter the body when their eggs are swallowed. The eggs hatch and grow into adult worms in your intestine. The worms come out of your anus at night, and lay their eggs on the skin outside.

### How are they caught?

The eggs can be picked up on the fingers, on clothing or objects, from the floor and sometimes by inhaling them as they drift through the air. When they are in the body, they grow into adults and start laying eggs. Eggs can spread through unwashed hands to other family members and friends.

### What are the symptoms of thread worms?

The main symptom is intense itching of the anal area, especially at night. Causing scratching. Eggs picked up on the fingers can then spread to other people. In severe cases threadworms can cause weight loss and increased appetite (but this is rare). Some people have no symptoms.

### Who gets them?

Children are most commonly infected. They catch them from other children at school. Once infected they can pass the infection to people in the family and friends.

### Are threadworms harmful?

Threadworms can be irritating, they can cause disturbed sleep and sore bottoms in children because of the itching, but they are harmless.

### How can I treat them?

There are several treatments available for sale. Your chemist family doctor or health visitor will advise you on the most suitable one. This sometimes includes a mild laxative. The whole family should be treated. It is advisable to repeat the treatment 2 weeks later, so that newly hatched worms can be got rid of.

### How can I prevent them?

Re-infection is common. Below are some suggestions for reducing the risk of re-infection.

#### For an infected person:

- Ensure hands are washed thoroughly after going to the toilet and before meals
- Keep fingernails cut short
- Wear pyjamas or pants in bed
- Have a bath each morning, and ensure the bottom is thoroughly washed
- Don't share towels/flannels. Paper towels should be used in communal toilets such as schools.
- Young children should be supervised to see that they wash their hands properly
- Change and wash underwear and pyjamas every day

#### For the family:

- Keep nails cut short
- Wash hands and scrub finger nails after going to the toilet
- Wash hands and scrub finger nails before each meal
- Clean the toilet seat, handle and door handle regularly
- Damp dust and vacuum clean bedrooms daily
- Wash bed sheets twice a week

### Consult your doctor or health visitor for further advice

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