



Weill Cornell Medical College

ClinicalKey®

Patient Education:

Giardiasis

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Keyword(s): parasitic infection;intestinal infection;Giardia lamblia;giardiasis;diarrhea;traveler's diarrhea;camping andwaterborne illness

description **Learn about giardiasis, the sickness caused by the parasite giardia.**

Overview

What is giardiasis?

Giardia (say gee-ar-dee-ah) is the name of a microscopic parasite that can live in the human bowel. The sickness that this parasite causes is called giardiasis (say gee-ar-dye-a-sis). Some symptoms of giardiasis are diarrhea, belching, gas and cramps. Although these problems are very unpleasant, the illness isn't usually dangerous.

Causes & Risk Factors

How does a person get this disease?

Giardiasis is easy to catch if you drink untreated water. Many animals carry giardia in their feces and may introduce this parasite into rivers, streams and springs in rural areas. Infected stream water may look clean and safe when it really isn't. City water may also be infected if sewer lines flood or leak. If you travel overseas, you may get giardiasis by drinking water (even tap water) that hasn't been boiled or treated. Some people who get giardiasis don't become ill, but they may spread the parasite to other people. Giardiasis may be spread in day care centers if workers aren't careful to wash their hands each time after changing diapers.

Diagnosis & Tests

How can my doctor tell if I have this disease?

Your doctor can usually diagnose giardiasis by looking at stool samples under a microscope, although several samples may have to be checked before the diagnosis can be made. Sometimes other tests may be necessary.

Treatment

How is this disease treated?

Giardiasis is usually treated with a medicine called metronidazole. It's usually taken 3 times a day for 5 to 10 days. Side effects may include a metallic taste in the mouth or nausea. If you take metronidazole, you should not drink any alcohol. This medicine shouldn't be taken in the early stages of pregnancy. Children younger than 5 years of age may be treated with furazolidone. This medicine has fewer side effects and comes in a liquid form, but it shouldn't be given to babies younger than 1 month of age. It's usually best if a whole family is treated at the same time, because giardiasis is so easily spread. In most cases, your doctor will want to check a stool sample after the treatment to be sure the medicine worked. Sometimes you may need to take medicine for a longer time, or your doctor may want you to take another medicine for a complete cure.

Prevention

How can I prevent giardiasis?

If you are traveling or camping, be very careful about the water you drink. If someone in your family gets giardiasis, it's likely that this problem will spread to everyone in your home--especially to the children. When camping, take bottled water or boil water before you use it. Wash your hands carefully with soap and water several times a day. When traveling, don't brush your teeth or wash dishes with water that hasn't been boiled. Peel raw fruits and vegetables before you eat them, and don't eat undercooked food.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- My family is going camping. How can we prevent giardiasis?
- What should I do if I think I have giardiasis?
- Do water filters prevent giardiasis?
- What are the symptoms of giardiasis?
- Are there medicines that prevent giardiasis? Is there a vaccine for giardiasis?
- What medicines treat giardiasis? Are there side effects?