

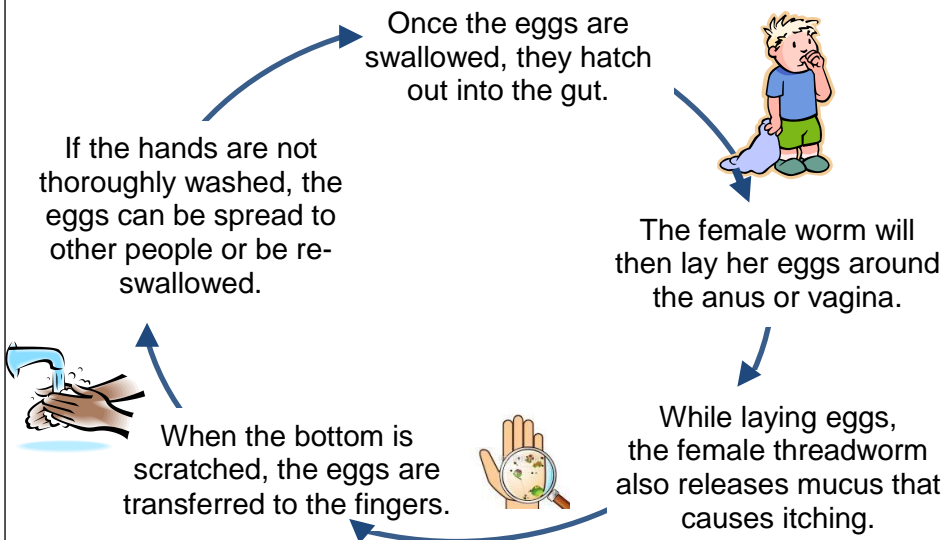
Self-care information on...

# Threadworm



## What are threadworms?

Threadworms (also known as pinworms) are small, thin, white, thread-like worms between 2 mm and 13 mm long. The infection occurs in your gut (intestine) and begins when threadworm eggs are swallowed.



Threadworm eggs can be transferred from the anus (or vagina) to anything that you touch including:

- bed sheets and bed clothes
- kitchen surfaces and utensils
- flannels, towels, toothbrushes
- furniture and children's toys.
- and other bathroom surfaces

Threadworm eggs can survive on surfaces for up to three weeks.

Threadworm infections are common in young children because they often forget to wash their hands after going to the toilet. However anyone of any age can be affected.

### **What are the symptoms of threadworm?**

- Intense itching around the anus (or the vagina in girls), particularly at night.
- Disturbed sleep as a result of the itching, which can lead to irritability.

Severe or persistent threadworm infections can cause:

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Skin infection (if bacteria get into the scratches caused by itching)
- Difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep.

### **Looking for threadworms**

Threadworms are difficult to see because of their size and colour. The best time to try to find threadworms is at night when female worms come out to lay their eggs. If you are trying to see whether your child has threadworms, check about two to three hours after they have fallen asleep. The worms may be visible on your child's night clothes or bed sheets.

Threadworms can sometimes also be found in stools (faeces). Threadworm eggs are not visible to the naked eye.

### **How do you treat threadworms?**

To successfully treat threadworms, all household members must be treated, even if they have no symptoms. The aim of treatment is to get rid of the threadworms and prevent re-infection. To do this, you can use one of the following methods:

## 1. Hygiene method

Strict hygiene measures can be used to clear up a threadworm infection and reduce the likelihood of re-infection.

The life span of threadworms is approximately six weeks, so it is important that the hygiene measures are followed for six weeks. Everyone in the household must follow the advice outlined below.

- Wash all night clothes, bed linen, towels and soft toys when you are first diagnosed. This can be done at normal temperatures but make sure that the washing is well rinsed.
- Thoroughly vacuum and dust the whole house, paying particular attention to the bedrooms. Continue to vacuum regularly and thoroughly.
- Carefully clean the bathroom and kitchen by damp-dusting surfaces and washing the cloth frequently in hot water. Continue to clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces regularly and thoroughly.
- Avoid shaking any material that may be contaminated with eggs, such as clothing or bed sheets. This will help prevent eggs being transferred to other surfaces.
- Do not eat food in the bedroom, because you may end up swallowing eggs that have been shaken off the bedclothes.
- Keep your fingernails short. Encourage other members of your household to do the same.
- Discourage nail-biting and sucking fingers. In particular, make sure that children do not suck their thumb.
- Wash your hands frequently and scrub under your fingernails, particularly before eating, after going to the toilet and before and after changing your baby's nappy.
- Wear close-fitting underwear at night and change your underwear every morning.
- Bath or shower regularly, particularly first thing in the morning. Make sure that you clean around your anus and vagina to remove any eggs.
- Ensure that everyone in your household has their own face flannel and towel. Do not share towels.
- Keep toothbrushes in a closed cupboard and rinse them thoroughly before use.

Children can easily pick up another threadworm infection from friends or at school, so maintaining good hygiene may help prevent another outbreak.

## 2. Medication

Medication can be used to treat threadworms. It should be taken by everyone in the household. Both treatments are very effective at killing the threadworms but they do not kill the eggs therefore the hygiene measures listed on page three must be followed for two weeks after treatment. Your pharmacist will be able to advise you and your family which treatment is most appropriate. There are two medicines commonly used:

- **Mebendazole**

- \* It can be brought from your local pharmacy
- \* It is available as a chewable tablet or as a liquid
- \* Do not use if you are pregnant or breast feeding, the hygiene method should be used

- **Piperazine with senna**

- \* It can be brought from your local pharmacy
- \* It cannot be taken by people who have epilepsy
- \* Do not use if you are pregnant or breast feeding, the hygiene method should be used

You should always follow the dosage information in the patient information leaflet that comes with the medicine.

### **When to contact your GP practice**

- You think that you have a skin infection in the area around the anus
- If your child is less than three months old
- If the infection continues after two treatments or the hygiene method has failed

If you need any further information:

- Ask your pharmacist
- NHS choices: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- Patient UK [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

