



AYOT PLACE PRACTICE

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Threadworms

Threadworm infestation in children is very common, with around 50% of children suffering from them at some time in their lives. The good news is that the worms do not live for very long and may well be overcome without any need for treatment. Remember that adults as well as children can catch them. Note, threadworms are also known as pinworms.

What are Threadworms?

They are small parasitic worms named enterobius vermicularis. They are 1cm or ½" long when adult. They enter the body as eggs through the mouth and hatch in the intestine, where they live for 2 to 6 weeks. The female lays eggs around the anus and this activity causes itching. The itching makes the sufferer scratch their bottom, picking up the eggs to be transferred elsewhere to infect others, or perhaps back into the mouth to re-infect the child. They can spread to other family members. They do not cause any long-term illness once eradicated.

How to tell if your child has threadworms

The most common symptom is itching around the bottom, especially at night. Other signs can be nose picking, teeth grinding and occasionally some tenderness in the abdomen. Sometimes you can see the adult worms, looking like fine silk threads, in the faeces or on the buttocks. The eggs are too small to see with the naked eye.

Hygiene and other practical measures

As scratching the bottom spreads the worm infection, then the first priority is to discourage this. You can explain to the child not to scratch, but remember that much of the scratching will be done at night when the child is asleep. Limit access to the anus, by using nightclothes to make the bottom hard to reach, such as pants and pyjamas worn together. Fingernails should be kept very short so that eggs do not hide there and the hands of everyone at home should be washed frequently, always scrubbed after using the lavatory and always before eating. Towels should not be shared if a member of the family has worms, because the parasite can be spread on such items as blankets, towels and flannels.

The worms can be picked up from toys, etc. so clean hands are important. Bedclothes should be washed frequently until the infestation is over, using a hot wash and ironing the sheets and pillowcases to kill any remaining eggs. The child should be bathed daily, ideally in the morning, especially around the bottom to remove any eggs.

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Foods and herbs that can help get rid of Threadworms

Some foods have a good reputation for removing worms and the most important of these is garlic. It might be too harsh for children raw, so use plenty in cooking or try garlic capsules. Raw carrot is also a good remedy, so you could try this grated or juiced- the recommended level is 2 to 3 raw carrots a day. Pumpkin seeds are a well-tried remedy and can be bought ready shelled and eaten as a tasty snack, even toasted and salted. Many of the more exotic fruits and spices also have useful properties, e.g. pineapple, pomegranate, paw-paw, papaya, ginger, turmeric and black cumin. Some of these foods actually break down the worms, while others cause them to lose their hold or poison them. You could make a juice of many of the foods mentioned, perhaps combined with prune juice to get things moving through the gut quickly -take this for 2-3 days.

An old remedy is to insert a slither of garlic or onion into the anus at night, however, this might be too harsh for the sensitive skin in that area.

If hygiene and dietary approaches are used, it may not be necessary to use any herbs, but those traditionally used are Wormwood and Quassia both internally and as an enema. Such herbs are strong and should not be used by very young children or pregnant women. They are best taken under the supervision of a qualified Medical Herbalist.

Prescribed remedies for Threadworms

Sometimes your GP will prescribe something to stop the anal itching and may give an internal treatment (e.g. Mebendazole) to kill the worms. Some parents prefer not to use the internal treatments as they can be quite harsh and include laxatives. Children under 2 years or pregnant women should not use these medicines.

If no internal treatment is used then the worms should eventually be overcome in a matter of six weeks, provided that scrupulous hygiene procedures are adopted.

Finally

Remember that threadworms are very common. They are not a major health problem and are fairly easy to remedy. Some children (and adults!) might have a problem in handling emotionally the idea of having worms inside them, as it is not a pleasant prospect. So when explaining the importance of cleanliness you might want to think of other words to use such as "germs", or "bugs". It is also wise to mention to teachers at school or nursery if your child gets infected- it is fairly likely that this will be the source of the worms, and it is important that the school improves its hygiene precautions to prevent re-infection and spread to other children.

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