



# MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

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## PINWORMS

### COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

The most common intestinal parasite seen among children in the United States is the pinworm. It is estimated that between 15 and 40 percent of all children are affected at some time during the first 12 years of life. Although children are particularly likely to be affected, adults sometimes harbor the parasites, especially if the children in the household have pinworms. Pinworm eggs are microscopic and can be easily swallowed without one's knowledge. The presence of pinworms does not indicate a lack of family hygiene.

### LIFE CYCLE

The pinworm itself is very small, measuring about half an inch in length. The adult worms are threadlike and white and inhabit the lower part of the intestine. The eggs are enclosed in a gelatinous material, which together with the movements of the female worms, causes itching and, as a consequence, scratching. During scratching, the eggs are picked up on the fingers and eventually carried to the mouth.

Pinworm eggs are easily transferred from one child to another via objects that are handled. A child is likely to become reinfected by carrying the pinworm eggs on the fingers or under the fingernails to the mouth.

### SYMPTOMS

The most common symptom is rectal itching, particularly at night. In girls it may cause vaginal itching or discomfort, and pain on urination. A child may also be restless and irritable, and on occasion complain of abdominal pain.. Most children who harbor pinworms, however, have no symptoms at all.

### DIAGNOSIS

To determine whether a child has pinworms, a strip of transparent adhesive tape is touched to the anal area and examined under the microscope in an attempt to find pinworm eggs. This test is most reliable early in the morning. Occasionally, the adult worms can be found either in the stool or near the rectum. They can be seen with the naked eye and more easily found late at night or in the early morning.

### TREATMENT

There are several effective medications for the treatment of pinworms. While pinworm infestation is a very common condition in childhood, it is more of a nuisance than a health hazard. It usually causes no symptoms and goes unnoticed. If the symptoms are troublesome, the parasites can almost always be eradicated with the appropriate medication.