

Giardiasis

What is it?

Giardiasis is an illness caused by a parasitic cyst which infects the small intestine, as few as 25 – 100 cysts could be responsible, the symptoms usually start 5 – 25 days after becoming infected.

What are the symptoms?

- May not show signs of illness
- Intermittent, smelly diarrhoea
- Bloating stomach with wind
- Loss of appetite
- Occasionally nausea

How can you catch it?

- From someone else who has the infection
- From drinking water contaminated with it, this is more likely to happen abroad and the cause of ‘traveler’s diarrhoea’
- From pets or animals that have it

How long does it last?

The illness usually lasts for several days but could last for several weeks

How is it treated?

Whilst you have diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids. This is one of the few stomach bugs where antibiotics may help, so you need to contact your doctor and make sure you complete the course

Can I give it to somebody else?

Yes, especially if you do not practice good hygiene the germ can be transferred accidentally from faeces to mouth

- Avoid unnecessary contact with people until your diarrhoea has stopped
- Avoid preparing food for other people
- Do not use swimming baths
- Make sure everyone at home uses their own towel
- Soiled clothes should be laundered on as hot a wash as possible, do not overfill your washing machine or it will not clean properly
- Clean and disinfect toilet seats, flush handles, door handles and taps frequently with hot soapy water/disinfectant. If you use disinfectant make sure you follow the manufacturer’s instructions

When can I go back to work, school or nursery?

Anyone with diarrhoea should remain off work until they have had 48 hours without any symptoms. If your work involves handling food, nursing or working with the young, sick or elderly you must tell your employer

What can I do to prevent getting it again?

- Wash and dry your hands before preparing food, after using the toilet and after changing a nappy

- Try to avoid swallowing water when involved with water sports and avoid drinking untreated water.
- Fruit and vegetables should be washed with drinking water prior to being eaten
- Use separate towels and do not share baths or bathing water