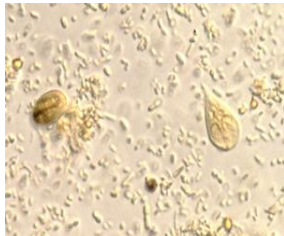


# Giardiasis

## What is Giardiasis?



Giardiasis is a diarrheal illness caused by the parasite *Giardia intestinalis* (also known as *Giardia lamblia* or *Giardia duodenalis*). A parasite is an organism that feeds off of another to survive.

Giardiasis is a global disease. It infects nearly 2% of adults and 6% to 8% of children in developed countries worldwide. Nearly 33% of people in developing countries have had giardiasis. In the United States, *Giardia* infection is the most common intestinal parasitic disease affecting humans.

## How is it Spread?

People become infected with *Giardia* by swallowing *Giardia* cysts (hard shells containing *Giardia*) found in contaminated food or water. Cysts are instantly infectious once they leave the host through feces. An infected person might shed 1-10 billion cysts daily in their feces and this might last for several months. However, swallowing as few as 10 cysts might cause someone to become ill. *Giardia* may be passed person-to-person or even animal-to-person. Also, oral-anal contact during sex has been known to cause infection.

## Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms may vary and can last for 1 to 2 weeks or longer. In some cases, people infected with *Giardia* may have no symptoms.

Symptoms of Giardiasis include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Greasy stools that tend to float
- Stomach or abdominal cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea/vomiting
- Dehydration

Other, less common symptoms include itchy skin, hives, and swelling of the eye and joints. Sometimes, the symptoms of giardiasis might seem to resolve, only to come back again after several days or weeks. Giardiasis can cause weight loss and failure to absorb fat, lactose, vitamin A and vitamin B12. In children, severe giardiasis might delay physical and mental growth, slow development, and cause malnutrition.

## Treatment

Several drugs can be used to treat *Giardia* infection. Different factors may shape how effective a drug regimen will be, including medical history, nutritional status, and condition of the immune system. Therefore, it is important to discuss treatment options with a health care provider.

## Diagnosis

Giardiasis is diagnosed by examining a stool sample under a microscope to look for *Giardia* cysts. Because a stool sample might contain only a few cysts, and they can be easy to miss, diagnosis sometimes requires several tests over several days.

## People at Risk

Anyone may become infected with *Giardia*. However, those at greatest risk are:

- Travelers to countries where Giardiasis is common
- People in child care settings
- Those who are in close contact with someone who has the disease
- People who swallow contaminated drinking water
- Backpackers or campers who drink untreated water from lakes or rivers
- People who have contact with animals who have the disease
- Men who have sex with men

The risk of humans acquiring *Giardia* infection from dogs or cats is small. The exact type of *Giardia* that infects humans is usually not the same type that infects dogs and cats.

## Prevention

To decrease your risk of Giardiasis:

- Practice good hygiene
- Avoid water (drinking and recreational) that may be contaminated
- Avoid eating food that may be contaminated
- Prevent contact and contamination with feces during sex
- Clean up after ill pets and people



**For more sources of information on this topic visit:**

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)