

## Pinworms

What are Pinworms?

Pinworms have the appearance of small white strands, they are about a centimeter long, they have a thin consistency and they are mobile.

They are also called *Enterobius vermicularis* and they live exclusively in the human intestine, more specifically in the large intestine and rectal ampoule.

They represent the most common form of intestinal parasitosis in human beings. It has been estimated that on average 10% of children have pinworms. It is mostly common among children and they are not dangerous for health.

The adult female form of Pinworm is approximately one centimeter long with a section which is about 0.5 mm long, while the male form is smaller. The adult pinworms can be seen with naked eyes, they are small white strands that move in the faeces or in the perianal area (area around the anus) during the early morning.

How does the infection take place?

The transmission occurs via faecal-oral path, which means through the ingestion of their eggs. At night and during early morning the females of these pinworms come out of the anus and leave their eggs in perianal or anal area; as a consequence the child feels the necessity of constantly itching.

The child's hands then remain full of contaminated residues with the eggs of the pinworms that can be transmitted to every object he has around (toys, pencils), and of course to the sheets, towels and underwear).

If another child or an adult touches the same objects that now have these residues and puts his hands in the mouth, he might then ingest the eggs.

These eggs open up in the intestine after about a month, growing as adult pinworms. The females of these new adults will then come out and deposit their eggs at the perianal area restarting the same process.

Unlike other parasites, the eggs of pinworms become infested just a few minutes after their deposition. Pinworms can be easily transmitted from children to adults.

What are the symptoms?

Although most people do not have symptoms, the most common symptom is perianal itching. It becomes more intense and disturbing in the early hours of the night, it then extends into the perianal area (space between anus and genitals). In girls it may take place around the vaginal area, causing restlessness and scratching injuries.

How to recognize the pinworms:

They are visible in the faeces and in order to confirm whether it is present or not it would be enough to take the "scotch test", which consists in positioning a thin strip of transparent adhesive tape in the patient's perianal area. This test should be done in early morning before using water. The parasitic eggs will remain attached to the sticky part of the scotch and with the use of lens it will be possible to identify the presence of pinworms.

What to do:

Proper hygiene prevents this infection and reinfestation:

- one must wash hands after going to the toilet, playing outdoors and before eating; one must use soap to clean hands very well, including the areas under the nails.
- it must be reminded to children not to scratch around the bottom area and not to put their hands in the mouth.

In case the child is infested with pinworms:

- taking a specific therapy under the instructions of the family doctor. The treatment should be extended to all members of the family in order to erase the presence of parasites definitively.
- changing underwears, sheets and towels with higher frequency than usual especially after shower and the day after taking the prescribed medicines. Bedsheet and underwears (including pajamas) must be removed paying attention to avoid the egg dispersion in the air and they must be washed in the washing machine at 60°C.
- washing toys with regular detergent or disinfectant.
- preferably use a liquid soap for handwashing and it would be better to use paper towels for wiping hands.

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