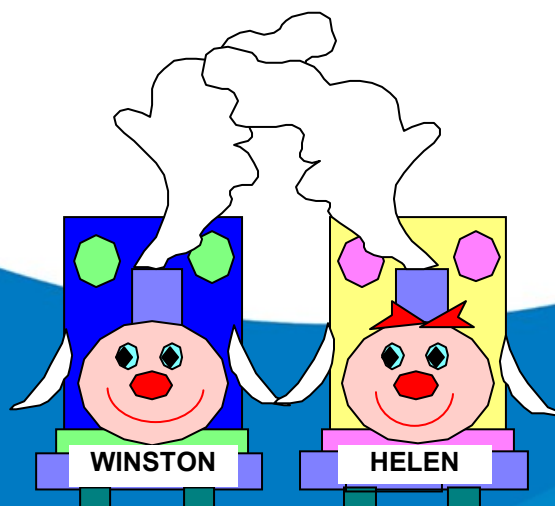


# Threadworm

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## The nature of the condition

Threadworms are small, thin, white, thread-like worms between 2 mm and 13 mm long.

They infect human guts (intestines). They are common in children, but anyone of any age can be affected.

## The life cycle of threadworms

Threadworms live for about 5-6 weeks in the gut, and then die. Before they die, the female worms lay tiny eggs around the anus (back passage). This tends to occur at night when you are warm and still in bed. The eggs are too small to see without a microscope, but cause itching around the anus due to accompanying irritating mucus. You then scratch around the anus to relieve the itching. You often do this without realising while you are asleep. When you scratch, eggs get on to your fingers and under your nails. You may then swallow some eggs if you put a finger into your mouth. Also, threadworm eggs can survive for up to two weeks outside the body. They fall off the skin around the anus and can fall on to bedding, clothes, etc. They can then get wafted in the air as you change clothes, bedding, etc, and become part of the dust in a home. Some eggs may settle on food or toothbrushes. So, children may swallow some eggs at first by playing with other children who have eggs on their fingers or from food, drink, toothbrushes, or dust that has been contaminated with threadworm eggs. Any eggs that you swallow then hatch and grow into adult worms in the gut. So a cycle of threadworm infection can go on and on.

## Are threadworms harmful?

Not usually.

Often, the worst thing about them is the itch and discomfort around the anus. This sometimes wakes children from sleep. Scratching may make the anus sore. Large numbers of threadworms may possibly cause mild abdominal (tummy) pains and make a child irritable. In girls, threadworms can wander forwards and lay their eggs in the vagina or urethra (the tube through which you pass urine).

Threadworms can cause other problems such as loss of appetite and weight loss and occasionally an itchy rash called urticaria.

## How can I tell if my child has threadworms?

- Threadworms look like thin, white, cotton threads. Sometimes you can see them in faeces (poo) in the toilet or nappy. You may also be able to see them around their bottom (anus). extreme itching around the anus or vagina, particularly at night, irritability and waking up during the night are also main symptoms of threadworm.

Your doctor may ask you to do a sticky tape test or send in a stool (poo) sample to confirm the presence of threadworms.

## What is the usual form of treatment

All household members, including adults and those without symptoms, should be treated. This is because many people with threadworms do not have any symptoms. However, they will still pass out eggs which can then infect other people. If one member of a household is infected, it is common for others also to be infected. So, everyone needs treatment!

The common management is:

- To take a medicine to kill the worms in your gut; and hygiene measures to clear eggs which may be around your anus or in your home.

## Medication

**Mebendazole** is the usual treatment for people aged over six months. All household members, including adults and those without symptoms, should take a dose at the same time. Just one dose kills the worms. A second dose two weeks after the first dose is sometimes needed if the infection has not cleared (which may occur if you swallow some eggs after taking the medication).

**Piperazine** is an alternative medicine. It can be used by anyone aged over three months. You need to take two doses, 14 days apart.

**Note:** for babies under the age of three months, only hygiene measures alone are possible, as no medicine is licensed for this age group.

## Pregnancy

If you are a pregnant mother during the first third of the pregnancy (first trimester) you should not take medicines which kill worms. However, hygiene measures alone may work. The worms die after about six weeks. Provided that you do not swallow any new eggs, then no new worms will grow to replace them. So, if you continue the hygiene measures described above for six weeks, this should break the cycle of re-infection, and clear your gut of threadworms. If treatment with medication is considered necessary in the second or third trimester of pregnancy, then your doctor may advise Mebendazole. However, strictly speaking, Mebendazole is not licensed to be used during pregnancy.

## Breast-feeding

If you are breast-feeding, again, six weeks of hygiene measures alone is the preferred treatment. If treatment with medication is considered necessary then your doctor may advise Mebendazole. However, strictly speaking, Mebendazole is not licensed to be used for breast-feeding mothers.

## Can a child with threadworms go to school?

Yes. There is no need to keep a child with threadworms off school, nursery, etc. The hygiene measures described above will mean that children will not have any eggs on their fingers when they go out from the home each day, and so are unlikely to infect others.

**If you have any further questions, please contact your child's consultant via their secretary via the hospital switchboard. The secretaries are available Monday to Friday, 9.00 am to 5.00 pm**

**If you need to contact the department outside of these hours, please phone either:**

**Ward 3F      0151 430 1616**

**Ward 4F      0151 430 1791**

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Warrington Road,  
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