

GIARDIASIS



Giardia (*Giardia lamblia*, *Giardia intestinalis*, or *Giardia duodenalis*) is a parasite that causes diarrheal illness called giardiasis. It is a common cause of diarrhea in Wisconsin. *Giardia* can be found in every region of the U.S. and around the world.

What causes it?



- ▶ *Giardia* is found in the feces (poop) of an infected person or animal. Anyone who comes into contact with the feces of infected people or animals can get *Giardia*. People become infected when they accidentally swallow the parasite. Some common causes of *Giardia* are:
 - ▶ Drinking water with the parasite in it (e.g., water from lakes, rivers, streams).
 - ▶ Eating unwashed fruits or vegetables with the parasite on them.
 - ▶ Not washing your hands properly before making or eating food after coming into contact with the parasite when doing outdoor activities.
 - ▶ Traveling to countries where *Giardia* may be found in the drinking water. This is because some countries do not have the same water treatment practices as in the U.S.
- ▶ It can spread anytime someone with giardiasis does not wash their hands after using the bathroom or goes swimming while having diarrhea. If you work in or go to a day care, you are at higher risk of getting *Giardia*.

What are the signs and symptoms?



Symptoms can start 3-25 days after accidentally swallowing *Giardia*, but usually show up in 7-10 days. Some people who get giardiasis have no symptoms at all, and some have symptoms that come and go.

- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Gas (farting)
- ▶ Greasy stools that float
- ▶ Stomach cramps
- ▶ Nausea or upset stomach
- ▶ Dehydration
- ▶ After feeling better, some people are more sensitive to dairy products

What are the treatment options?



- ▶ The illness usually lasts 2-6 weeks, but can come and go over a longer time period. *Giardia* can get better on its own, or there are several medications that can shorten the amount of time symptoms last.
- ▶ It is important to drink plenty of fluids, so you do not get dehydrated when you have diarrhea.





How can it be prevented?

Prevent spreading *Giardia* at home, your workplace, or daycare:

- ▶ Wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before eating or touching any food, including food for pets.
- ▶ Keep children who have diarrhea home until they are well.
- ▶ Make sure that people with diarrhea wash their hands thoroughly and often in order to reduce spreading *Giardia*. Teach children how to properly wash their hands.
- ▶ Do not go swimming if you have diarrhea.
- ▶ Do not have contact with feces during sexual intercourse.

Decrease risk of exposure from recreational water, drinking water, and the environment:

- ▶ Do not drink untreated water, including water from lakes, rivers, streams, rain barrels, springs, shallow wells, or hoses. Any standing water could have *Giardia* in it.
- ▶ You may not always know if your drinking water is safe. If you are hiking, camping, or traveling in any country where the drinking water may not be safe, drink only bottled water or treat your water in a way that will kill or remove *Giardia*. These include:
 - ▶ Boiling water at a rolling boil for one minute.
 - ▶ Using a filter with an absolute pore size ≤ 1 micron (NDF standard 53 or 58).
 - ▶ Using a chemical treatment with chlorine dioxide and following the package instructions.
- ▶ Wash your hands after doing any yard work, gardening, gutter cleaning, bird bath cleaning, or removing standing water from your yard, even if you wear gloves.
- ▶ Do not let any water get into your mouth when swimming.
- ▶ Have drinking water from wells tested every year for bacteria and nitrates.
- ▶ Wash raw fruits and vegetables with clean water before eating them.
- ▶ Remember that you can be exposed to *Giardia* every time you go fishing, handle bait or your catch, or touch lake water. It is important to wash your hands after doing any of these activities.
- ▶ Always wash your hands after having contact with farm animals, pets, animal feces, and anywhere an animal lives. Make sure to wear gloves and wash hands after cleaning up any feces.

