# Pinworms (Enterobius Vermicularis)

Your caregiver has diagnosed you as having pinworms. These are common infections of children and less common in adults. Pinworms are a small white worm less one quarter to a half inch in length. They look like a tiny piece of white thread. A person gets pinworms by swallowing the eggs of the worm. These eggs are obtained from *contaminated* (infected or tainted) food, clothing, toys, or any object that comes in contact with the body and mouth. The eggs hatch in the *small bowel* (intestine) and quickly develop into adult worms in the *large bowel* (colon). The female worm develops in the large intestine for about two to four weeks. It lays eggs around the anus during the night. These eggs then contaminate clothing, fingers, bedding, and anything else they come in contact with. The main *symptoms* (problems) of pinworms are itching around the anus (*pruritis ani*) at night. Children may also have occasional *abdominal* (belly) pain, loss of appetite, problems sleeping, and irritability. If you or your child has continual anal itching at night, that is a good sign to consult your caregiver. Just about everybody at some time in their life has acquired pinworms. Getting them has nothing to do with the cleanliness of your household or your personal hygiene. Complications are uncommon.

## DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis can be made by looking at your child's anus at night when the pinworms are laying eggs or by sticking a piece of scotch tape on the anus in the morning. The eggs will stick to the tape. This can be examined by your caregiver who can make a diagnosis by looking at the tape under a microscope. Sometimes several scotch tape swabs will be necessary.

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Your caregiver will give you medications. They should be taken as directed. Eggs are easily passed. The whole family often needs treatment even if no symptoms are present. Several treatments may be necessary. A second treatment is usually needed after two weeks to a month.
- **Maintain strict hygiene.** Washing hands often and keeping the nails short is helpful. Children often scratch themselves at night in their sleep so the eggs get under the nail. This causes reinfection by hand to mouth contamination.
- Change bedding and clothing daily. These should be washed in hot water and dried. This kills the eggs and stops the life cycle of the worm.
- Pets are not known to carry pinworms.
- An ointment may be used at night for anal itching.
- See your caregiver if problems continue.

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