

REMEDIES FOR PINWORMS

Pinworms can be very challenging to eliminate with herbal remedies, but with persistence and scrupulous attention to hygiene, it can be done. The worms have a life cycle of approximately two weeks, so the real trick to eliminating them is preventing reinfestation. If you are able to do this, you can clear up the problem in three to six weeks. If the problem persists after a number of attempts with natural remedies, a standard medication (such as Vermox) may be the best solution because a pinworm infestation can be very bothersome to a young child. In fact, even the medication without the hygienic measures often fail to prevent reinfestation, so no matter what you choose to do observe the following guidelines. Note that when one member of a family is infected, it is likely that all members have or will shortly have them and should be treated also. This is important to keep in mind because Vermox and other medications are not safe for pregnant women and children under two years.

GENERAL CARE AND HYGIENE

- First and foremost, it is essential that your family join together in the effort to prevent reinfestation. If the family works as a team, it will be far less of a demanding chore. Try to enlist everyone's goodwill and assistance. While hygiene and housekeeping are crucial, the family should not internalize the problem as "we're dirty." That is not the point at all, and that thought process undermines your family's ability to deal with the tasks at hand.
- Remember, if one person in the family is infected, treat everyone to prevent successive infections.
- Thoroughly wash hands before preparing food, and get children into the habit of washing hands with warm, soapy water upon awakening and before all meals.
- Keeping fingernails short will prevent the eggs from having a place to collect if you have any bottom scratchers or nose pickers in the family. This practice is very important in preventing reinfection. Teach family members that if they do scratch, they should wash hands and under nails immediately, and remind them to stop scratching!
- Get kids (and adults) to wear underwear or close-fitting bottoms to bed. This will prevent eggs and critters from getting very far.
- Change bath towels after each use, and launder hand towels every couple of days.
- Change all bedding every three days. Don't shake out the sheets as you take them off the bed, as this will send the tiny eggs flying. Just fold up the sheets and wash on a hot cycle.
- Vacuum (DON'T sweep) every couple of days, and damp-mop at least once a week. Clean around the toilet and wipe faucets and doorknobs in the bathroom every couple of days.
- This is a hefty regime, but if you want to avoid using medication, it is your best bet.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- This first remedy is probably the single most effective solution I know of, and it is (yay!) simple. It also brings relief to an itching bottom. Every night (either before your child goes to sleep or after if doing this will embarrass the child) paint a glob of petroleum jelly (Vaseline) onto and around your child's anus (a diameter of about a half-dollar will do). Some suggest zinc oxide (available in the pharmacy) instead, but it absorbs too easily; petroleum jelly is more effective. You must do this every night during the active phase of the outbreak and, ideally, every night for a total of four to six weeks. This is an excellent way to keep the female from laying eggs, thereby breaking the cycle of infection. You

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must repeat the remedy for the full time period to prevent the eggs from maturing and then the new females from laying.

- To treat vaginal pinworms (your daughter will complain of itching or pain or will scratch at her bottom during the day or as she is going to sleep), apply salve or petroleum jelly to the area of her labia and her perineum (the fleshy area between the vaginal opening and the anus) to reduce discomfort (she can do this herself if modesty is a concern) and repeat the application at night. Every day, give her a bath to which you add 1 cup of Epsom salts. She should find relief within three days.
- Teach girls to wipe from front to back after using the toilet to prevent spreading the eggs (and other germs as well). Be sure to address the possibility of urinary-tract infection, which may crop up with vaginal pinworms. Symptoms include frequent or painful urination, sometimes accompanied by chills, nausea, or soreness of the lower abdomen or lower back.

DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hygiene in the kitchen is the most beneficial remedy. Wash before meals; clean all fresh fruits and vegetables well, especially those that grow in or close to the soil; and get kids to use utensils instead of fingers for eating. Sharing food with other kids should be avoided so that your family isn't passing the problem along or picking it back up. Avoid serving finger foods during an outbreak.
- Even with a healthy diet, pinworms happen. However, de-emphasizing certain foods and emphasizing others can help eliminate them or prevent their recurrence.

Decrease or eliminate refined foods such as white flour and other highly processed products, baked goods, sweets (including natural ones), juices, and even the amount of fruit in the diet.

Increase or emphasize high-quality, nondairy protein; whole grains; and fresh vegetables, particularly those high in calcium and vitamin A such as leafy greens (kale, collards, mustard greens, broccoli), carrots (and carrot juice), squashes, and sea vegetables (dulse, kelp, hijiki). Calcium and vitamin A apparently help increase resistance to intestinal parasites.

- Certain foods are considered irritating and discouraging to worms. These include pickles, apple cider vinegar, salty foods, onions, garlic, hot peppers, and calamyrna figs. You may want to increase the spiciness of your diet for a while.
- Raw pumpkin seeds are considered a pinworm remedy par excellence. Let kids munch handfuls here and there, and add them to salad, oatmeal, and other foods. Up to a cup a day for school-age children is ideal, but less is, of course, better than none.
- Vegetarian kids may possibly be more susceptible to pinworms owing to what colleagues and I have speculated is a low level of hydrochloric acid in the stomach. Stomach HCl destroys the eggs, and vegetarians may have lower levels of this acid in the stomach. If your family is strictly vegetarian and you are having chronic problems with pinworms, you may want to think about adding small amounts of meat to your diet or speak with a nutritionist about ways you can raise the HCl levels.
- Digestive weakness in anyone can predispose them to parasites. Most kids will outgrow susceptibility to pinworms by age seven, perhaps because they naturally begin to observe better hygiene, spend less time playing in the soil and sand, and stop putting things into their mouths. Major Six Herbs Combination, a Chinese herbal formula for strengthening "digestive fire" in children, may help. It is available through Brion Herbs (see "Resources").

HERBAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following herbal medicaments are variably effective but may be included in a combination of your choice as part of an overall approach. Some are painfully bitter and are listed in case you want to try them with older children, but don't force unpleasant-tasting worming remedies on your kids. While bitter herbs have an important place in the elimination of pinworms, their strong flavor may be nature's way of protecting us from overconsuming these plants, many of which are rich in potentially toxic alkaloids.

- Garlic is a time-honored medicine for killing worms. It can be taken in garlic lemonade (see "Chills"), perles, or it may even be rubbed onto bare feet that have first been wiped with vegetable oil (though this use of garlic has occasionally caused blistering to sensitive feet!), but is most likely to be effective when eaten raw. As much as possible should be given, up to six raw cloves to older children. Obviously, this is a lot and some is better than none. Garlic can be chopped finely or put through a garlic press and swallowed in a spoonful of apple juice or honey, or added to soup, salad, or other dishes. Repeat as often as possible during the active phase of the infestation and every few days during the dormant phase. Keep in mind that too much garlic is going to make a kid's stomach feel lousy!
- Homeopathic cina 30x is often recommended. It is prepared from the plant called "wormseed." Repeat three times a day during active infection, and less often during the dormant phase. Homeopathic remedies work more to strengthen the constitution of the child than to actually eliminate the worms, so they should be an adjunct to another therapeutic method.
- Black walnut tincture, 10 to 20 drops two to three times a day, or false unicorn root tincture, 10 to 15 drops twice daily, may be effective in the elimination of this problem. The latter is quite bitter, but because it is a tincture the concentrated drops can be disguised in a food or beverage. Applesauce is a great medium for bitter tinctures, according to one friend of mine with a toddler.
- Aloe vera is an easy-to-grow houseplant that yields a juice that heals burns. It is also an intestinal purgative taken internally in large amounts. Midwife Sher Willis (Wonshe) shared the following remedy for getting rid of pinworms: Break off a very thin piece of the aloe plant. The length should equal the end section of the child's pinkie finger. Twice a day for seven days, have the child swallow a piece this size whole. After a week, repeat for three days; after another week, repeat for three more days.

If your child has trouble swallowing it whole, chop it into fine pieces and place them in the end of a drinking straw. As your child sips a drink through the straw, he or she will swallow the aloe.

- Wormwood is a dreadfully bitter and potentially toxic herb that is generally included in worm remedies. It is taken in an infusion of 1/2 ounce of herb to 1 quart of water. Standard dose is 1 cup daily for five days. Repeat for two days in the next two consecutive weeks. Wormweed is fairly unpalatable to most adults, not to mention kids, and it's nearly impossible to give a sufficient quantity to be effective. A worm medication is preferable.
- Laxative herbs such as fennel seeds and plantain seeds may assist the body in expelling worms. Fennel can be taken as a tea to reduce bellyaches and gas. Plantain seeds, which are similar to flax seeds, can be gathered in the autumn or purchased at an herb shop or health-food store that sells herbs. Take 1 tablespoon daily for a few weeks. They can be

sprinkled in foods, eaten raw, or made into a paste by grinding them with honey and nut butter.

- Seeds from the papaya fruit contain enzymes believed to destroy worms as well as aid digestion. Natural-food stores usually sell them in chewable tablets, which are sweet, making this a good remedy to follow a less-palatable one as an incentive for kids. Because papaya seeds work by breaking down animal proteins, it may be best to decrease meat and dairy products during the treatment period. Give according to the dosage recommended for the product you purchase, every day for four to six weeks.
- Remember not to guilt-trip yourself or your family if you need to use a prescription drug. Everything has its place. With persistence and carefully observed hygiene, however, you stand a good chance of eliminating this problem naturally.