



PET TOPICS

All Pets Center

Giardia

Your pet has been diagnosed with Giardia, which is a microscopic one-celled parasite that lives in the small intestine of man and animals. When present in large numbers, Giardia can cause diarrhea, stomach cramps, excessive gas, weight loss, and even vomiting. Giardia seems to be common in the Grand Junction area due to our climate and water supply.

How Did My Pet Get Giardia?

Many pets get Giardia from their mother. As they crawl on their mother and nurse, tiny amounts of stool get in their mouths and transfer the Giardia to the puppy or kitten. Some animals can get Giardia from drinking contaminated irrigation water or eating Giardia-containing stool. Some studies have found Giardia cysts in house dust.

Is There a Treatment for Giardia?

There are several treatments for Giardia. Your veterinarian will decide which medication is safest and best for your pet. Sometimes, we may need to try several medications before we get a good response.

Can Humans Catch Giardia From Their Pet?

Yes, it is possible for you to catch Giardia from your pet. Because it is so common to this area, many adults have developed some immunity to Giardia. Young children and elderly people are especially at risk. Humans generally develop diarrhea when they catch Giardia but some people just develop mild flulike symptoms and poor appetite.

What Are The Signs of Giardia In My Pet?

Most animals develop some degree of diarrhea with Giardia. The stool is generally soft or cow-pie. The stool is often very smelly. The pet may be very "gassy". Some kittens and puppies are ill from Giardia. Many kittens and puppies are just thin and not gaining weight. Some pets will have some blood in the stool due to colon irritation and straining. We recommend treatment in all Giardia positive kittens and puppies. We recommend treatment in all Giardia-positive adult pets with abnormal stools.

Will We Be Able To Cure My Pet of Giardia?

Unfortunately, Giardia may establish itself as a normal flora parasite. Once the Giardia becomes established, it can be difficult to completely cure. Many animals develop immunity to the Giardia but still maintain a low number of the organisms in their systems and display no clinical signs. These animals are chronic Giardia carriers. It is unrealistic to expect to clear Giardia from a chronic carrier. As long as the stool is normal and there are no symptoms, many of these animals do not require treatment. If your pet has Giardia, there are three possible outcomes:

1. Your pet may be cured after one or several treatments. As long as your pet is not re-exposed to Giardia, it should remain Giardia-free.
2. Your pet may improve on the medication, still have a few Giardia in the stool, and become a chronic carrier. These pets may have occasional Giardia flare-ups (brought on by stress, diet change, rich "people food") that will require medications to reduce the Giardia numbers and return the stool to normal. Some kittens and puppies must be periodically treated until they are full grown. Once full-grown, their immune systems will hopefully keep the numbers of Giardia low without constant treatment. This is a common outcome.
3. A few pets will develop constant diarrhea from Giardia and develop diarrhea once the medication stops. These animals may require some form of long term treatment for their whole lives to keep the Giardia numbers low. This is a rare outcome.