

Client  
Information

Series **Giardia**

**What You Should Know About Giardia**

*Giardia* (je-ar' de-ah) exist in two forms: teardrop-shaped trophozoites and oval cysts. Both forms are invisible to the eye, but can be seen with the aid of a microscope. Infection occurs when a dog or cat ingests the cyst stage of the parasite. Noninfected animals usually acquire the infection when they come in contact with infected animals, cyst-laden feces, or contaminated food and water. Likely places of infection include kennels and vacation sites, especially mountainous areas. *Giardia* cysts may survive for weeks in cold, wet climates. Once in the dog's or cat's small intestine, the cyst matures into the trophozoite form, which attaches to the lining of the digestive tract. Five to 10 days after infection, trophozoites and cysts appear in the stool of the newly infected animal. These cysts serve as a source of infection for other animals. Younger dogs and cats (less than 3 years old) are most susceptible, especially animals less than 12 months of age. There is a slight chance that people may be susceptible to *Giardia* infections acquired from pets. Therefore, all animals with giardiasis should be treated to reduce the chance for human exposure.

**Giardia**

Your pet has *Giardia*. *Giardia* are microscopic parasites that live in the small intestines of dogs and cats. Giardiasis, the disease caused by *Giardia*, is characterized by weight loss and chronic diarrhea.

Giardiasis is treated with drugs that rid the body of the parasite and with medications to treat diarrhea. This client education sheet will help you learn more about *Giardia* infection and will review your veterinarian's instructions for your pet's care at home, as well as follow-up with the veterinary health care team.

**Giardia**

**Diagnostic Plan**

History  
Physical examination  
Stool analysis  
Analysis of intestinal scrapings collected during endoscopy

**Therapeutic Plan**

Drugs to kill the parasite

**Nutritional Plan**

Nutrition based on individual patient evaluation including body condition and other organ system involvement or disease

*Giardia* species exist as motile trophozoites and nonmotile cysts. Both forms are transmitted by ingestion

and are passed intermittently  
in the host's feces. **Diagnosis**

Microscopic examination of fresh stool specimens by your veterinarian is the usual method of finding *Giardia*;

however, cysts and trophozoites may only appear sporadically in the stool. Therefore, several microscopic examinations of feces over several days may be required to establish a diagnosis. These contents are then examined under a microscope. Some veterinary laboratories are capable of diagnosing *Giardia* infections through the use of special tests.

#### **Treatment and Home Care**

Several drugs exist for killing *Giardia* in your pet's digestive tract. Animals with severe diarrhea may require antidiarrheal medications as well.

Control measures should also be used to prevent reinfection and lessen the chances for human infection.

Stools should be removed from kennels, yards, and litter pans daily. Drying will destroy *Giardia* cysts, so litter pans and kennels should be kept as dry as possible. Disinfectants such as dilute chlorine bleach effectively reduce *Giardia* cyst contamination in areas where disinfectants can be used.

#### **Nutritional Plan**

If your pet has giardiasis, your veterinarian may suggest a dietary change based on your pet's age and body condition, the degree of diarrhea and weight loss, and the presence or absence of disease in other organs and body systems. If your pet has a severe infection, your veterinarian may give you special feeding instructions.

Optimal nutrition should provide for a pet's needs during each stage of its life. Optimal nutrition should also reduce the health risks associated with feeding excess levels of nutrients such as sodium, calcium, phosphorus, protein, and fat. Foods that avoid these harmful excesses and provide proper nutrition for each life stage include the Hill's® Science Diet® pet foods for growing puppies and kittens, young adults, and mature adults over seven years of age.

#### **Transitioning Food**

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period.

Mix the new food with your pet's former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn't readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). However, do not add water to your cat's food. Feed only the recommended food. Be patient but firm with your pet.

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### **Home Care Instructions**

Client's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Patient's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Medication(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Nutritional Recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-Up Appointment: \_\_\_\_\_ (Hospital Stamp Area Above)

REGULAR VISITS WILL HELP OUR VETERINARY HEALTH CARE TEAM PROVIDE FOR YOUR PET'S BEST INTEREST.

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