



Giardia species exist as motile trophozoites and nonmotile cysts. Both forms are transmitted by ingestion and are passed intermittently in the host's feces.

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

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.

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 in mountainous areas. Giardia cysts may survive for weeks in cold, wet climates.

Once in the 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.

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 Hill's® Science Diet® brand pet foods.

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). Feed only the recommended food. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

Presented as an educational service by



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.