

# INTERNAL PARASITES IN CATS

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Intestinal parasites are extremely common in both cats and dogs. Several types of internal parasites (frequently referred to as worms) can infect animals of any age, although puppies and kittens tend to be the biggest victims. While many animals can be asymptomatic carriers of these parasites, others can become very sick. The most common types of parasites are roundworms, tapeworms, hookworms, whipworms, coccidia and giardia. Some of these parasites can occasionally infect humans as well. In order to prevent spread of these parasites, routine fecal testing, a preventative deworming schedule, and good sanitation/environmental control are essential.

Sometimes cats will have no obvious signs that they are carrying parasites. Adult worms are not always seen in the feces and sometimes the parasite eggs or larvae lie dormant in the intestinal tract until they become activated under times of stress. However, the most common symptom of having intestinal parasites is diarrhea. If the parasite burden is large, they can also cause vomiting, obstruction, decreased appetite, lethargy, weight loss, or a poor general appearance.



## HOW CAN I PREVENT INTERNAL PARASITES

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See your veterinarian if your cat has diarrhea, weight loss, increased scooting, a dull coat, or if you see worms under its tail, in its bedding, or on its stool. Deworming on a regular basis can prevent infection. Nursing female cats and their litters are also major sources for the spread of infective eggs and larvae. If you have a new kitten or pregnant cat, consult with your veterinarian.

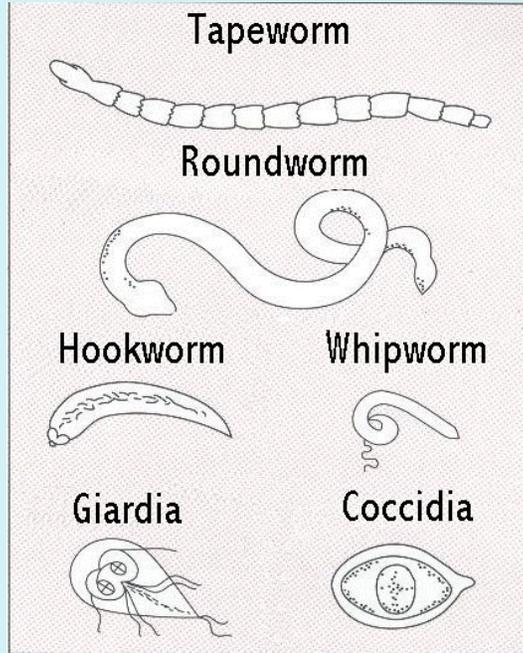
Worm infections in humans can be easily prevented by practicing good hygiene and sanitation. Children should not be allowed to play in areas that are soiled with pet feces and should wash their hands after playing outside.

## ROUNDWORMS

Roundworms are the most common intestinal parasite in dogs and cats. Animals with roundworms pass the infection to other animals when the worm eggs develop into larvae and are present in the animal's feces. Your pet can pick up the infection by eating infected soil, licking contaminated fur or paws, or by drinking contaminated water. Infected female cats may pass the infection to their kittens after birth through their milk when they are nursing. Roundworms live in the small intestine, stealing nutrients from the food pets eat and cause malnutrition and intestinal upset.

## HOOKWORMS

Hookworms are the second most common intestinal parasite found in dogs, but they are less commonly seen in cats. Your pet can become infected when larvae penetrate the skin or lining of the mouth. Hookworms are dangerous because they actually bite into the intestinal lining of an animal and suck blood. Kittens are at higher risk of infection and developing severe disease. Left untreated, this infection can lead to significant blood loss, weakness, and malnutrition.



## GIARDIA

Giardia is a single-celled parasite that, if swallowed, can cause damage to the lining of the intestine and reduce nutrient absorption. While most infections of Giardia do not cause illness, severe infections can lead to diarrhea. Giardia is harder to diagnose than other intestinal parasites and require stool sample testing. It is also highly contagious and kittens are at higher risk for contracting this infection.

## TAPEWORMS

Tapeworms get their name because they are thin and flat, like strips of tape. Cats can become infected when they eat infected fleas, lice, or rodents. Tapeworms live in the small intestine and eat nutrients from the food your cat eats, just like roundworms. An infection is diagnosed when the egg sacs are seen under the pet's tail or in its stool. These sacs look like flattened grains of rice. Feline tapeworms are species-specific and do not pose a risk to people.

## WHIPWORMS

Whipworms get their name from their whip-like shape. These parasites are also passed through the animal's feces. Like hookworms, whipworms bite into the intestinal lining and suck blood, but are generally less harmful. Whipworm rarely infects humans.

## COCCIDIA

Coccidia are single-celled parasites and are not visible to the naked eye. Your pet can become infected by eating infected soil or by licking infected fur or paws. These parasites damage the lining of the intestines and interfere with the absorption of nutrients. Kittens are especially vulnerable to this parasite.