



GIARDIASIS

ABOUT THE DISEASE

Giardia is a single-cell organism (protozoa) that causes a disease called **giardiasis**. It infects the small intestines and can lead to nutrient absorption issues or sometimes diarrhea.

Protozoal infections in canine and feline patients can be classified into two main categories:

- Enteric – Those that primarily infect the intestinal tract.
 - o These are typically cases of coccidiosis and **giardiasis**.
- Multisystemic – Those that can spread throughout the body.
 - o These are typically cases of toxoplasmosis and neosporosis.

Patients are often infected by directly consuming food or water contaminated with the infectious **giardia** cysts.

The majority of **giardia** infections are without clinical signs, but in young canine and feline patients, it can cause a watery or loose diarrhea which can either be acute (sudden) or chronic (ongoing) and may be intermittent. Most cases are self-limiting, but the more severe cases of **giardiasis** are caused when patients are also infected with other viral, bacterial, or parasite infections.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Giardia is often difficult to detect on routine fecal testing. A negative fecal result should not completely exclude the chances of infection.

New rapid in-house testing (ELISA) has allowed veterinarians to quickly detect the **giardia** organism using fresh feces.

TREATMENT

Giardiasis can be treated with several routine medications found in most veterinary clinics. The two most effective are:

- Metronidazole – effective with minimal side effects, but may only work on one-third of infections due to resistance
- Fenbendazole – safe and effective in canine patients, with some questionable efficacy in feline patients

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- A clean and sanitary housing and feeding environment will greatly reduce the chances of infection.
- Clinical signs can be acute or chronic, continuous or intermittent, and may be persistent without self-resolution.
- In-house **giardiasis** testing should be considered in any puppy presenting with diarrhea.