

# Blastocystis Infection

*Blastocystis* is a single-celled parasite which is commonly found in people who have diarrhoea or other intestinal symptoms. There is a great deal of debate about whether *Blastocystis* causes illness or not. Often there is another cause of the symptoms which has not yet been found.

In fact, there is not much that is known with certainty about *Blastocystis* and research is under way to try to understand what it is and what it does.

Symptoms which may be caused by *Blastocystis* include:

- > watery or loose bowel motions or diarrhoea
- > abdominal pain
- > itching around the anus (back passage)
- > weight loss
- > excess gas.

However, many people in whom *Blastocystis* is found have no symptoms at all.

Diagnosis is made by microscopic examination of a stool specimen.

*Blastocystis* is found throughout the world, especially in developing countries, and occurs in humans and many other types of animals. It is not known how the infection is transmitted, but it may be through contaminated food and water.

## Incubation period

*(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)*

Unknown. *Blastocystis* may remain in the intestines for years.

## Infectious period

*(time during which an infected person can infect others)*

It is not known if person-to-person spread occurs.

## Treatment

Some people's symptoms respond to a short course of an antibiotic such as metronidazole; others do not. Most infections will eventually go away without any treatment.

## Control of spread

- > As it is not known how the infection is spread, the best advice is to maintain good personal hygiene practices, prepare food carefully and avoid drinking water that may not be clean.

- > Preventing Food Poisoning at Home
- > Collecting a Faecal Sample