

What is blastocystosis?

Blastocystosis is an intestinal infection caused by *Blastocystis hominis*, a common microscopic parasitic organism found throughout the world.

What are the symptoms of blastocystosis?

The majority of people who carry the organism have no symptoms at all, however watery or loose stools, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, weight loss and excess gas have all been reported.

How long will I be infected?

Blastocystis hominis can remain in the intestines for weeks, months, or years.

Can I be sure *Blastocystis hominis* is the cause of my symptoms?

It is unknown whether *Blastocystis hominis* is the primary cause of your symptoms. The presence of the organism in stool samples does not mean it is the cause of your symptoms and the finding should be accompanied by a careful search for other possible causes (e.g. other parasitic organisms, bacteria, or viruses). Often *Blastocystis hominis* is found along with other organisms that are a more likely cause of your symptoms. Sometimes the symptoms are not caused by an infection at all, but may be due antibiotics, some cancer drugs, or medications used to control high blood pressure. Hormone and endocrine diseases, diseases such as Crohn's disease, colitis, and hereditary factors may produce similar symptoms, and food additives and food allergies may also cause abdominal discomfort.

Is blastocystosis common?

Yes, but many people who carry *Blastocystis hominis* never have symptoms.

Can *Blastocystosis* be diagnosed?

Detection of blastocystis occurs using PCR.

Is medication available to treat blastocystosis?

Patients without symptoms do not require treatment. Patients with symptoms should submit further stool specimens for examination for other potential pathogens. If no other causes of symptoms are identified, a trial of therapy may be indicated. Note that this infection is often self-limiting and treatment is not always effective.

How did I get blastocystosis?

How *Blastocystis hominis* is transmitted is unknown, although the number of infections seems to increase in areas where sanitation and personal hygiene are inadequate.

Should I be concerned about spreading infection to the rest of my household?

No, if you maintain good personal hygiene there is little risk of spreading infection.