

**Itchy bum
(pinworm infections)**

*Mummy: I could not sleep last night
because my bum was sooooo itchy!*



Photo by Allan Mas: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/crop-child-drawing-on-asphalt-5622385/>

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Like every day, the twins Mario and Elena have breakfast before going to school.

But Mario is not going to school today. He had a bad night. He couldn't sleep because his bottom itched a lot, and he woke up crying several times.

His parents have been worried. Mario is a very good boy, ever since he was little, and if he complains, there must be a reason.

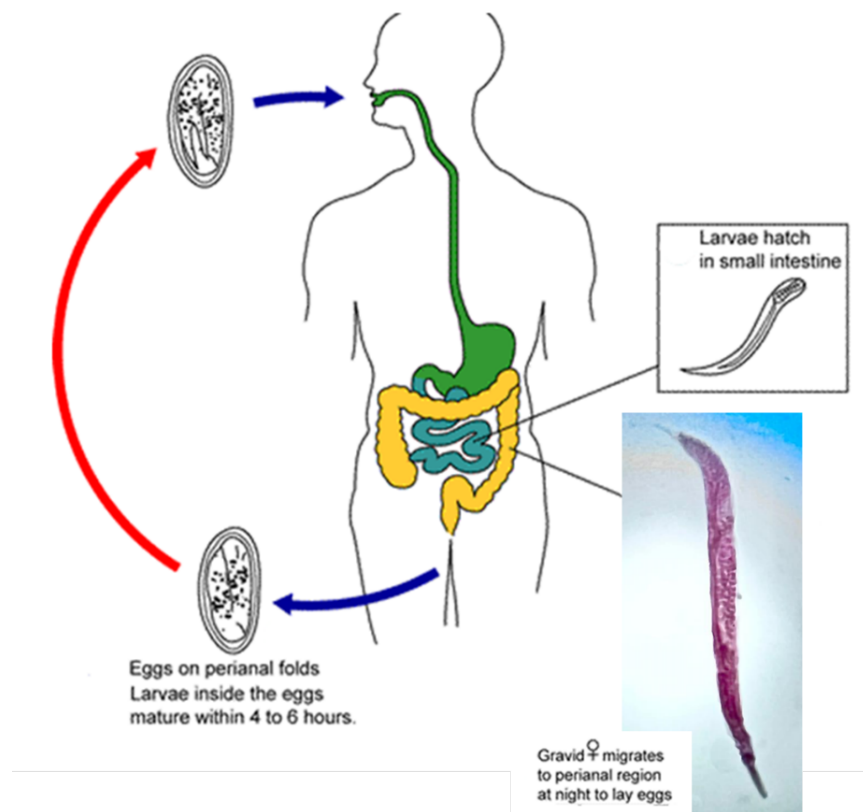
That's why they decided to take him to the doctor. So, his mother has accompanied Elena to school, and Mario has gone with his father to Eva, the family paediatrician.

Mario hasn't had to go to the doctor for a long time because he doesn't usually get sick. In the waiting room there is a baby in a pram. Mario's dad remembers the many visits to the paediatrician they made with the twins after they were born, and explains to Mario how important vaccinations are to protect them from many illnesses from a very young age.

It's their turn to go in. The doctor welcomes them with a big smile: 'Mario, long time no see! You've grown up so much! And your sister? She didn't come today, did she? Come on, sit down, and tell me what happened.'

When they told the doctor the symptoms, she made Mario take off his shoes and clothes. 'Let's see how tall you are first! - And now get up on the examination table so that I can take a look.'

The doctor explained that the most frequent cause of these symptoms are intestinal worms: they are small white worms called *Enterobius* that live in our intestine, that long tube in which we digest our food. These little worms, which are like little white threads, form families, and the females lay eggs, like chickens and fish, but much, much smaller. In order to lay their eggs, they have to go outside, through the anus, and they move around a lot, as if they were going crazy, and they do this especially at night. And that's when bums get itchy.



A child-centric microbiology education framework

Then the children scratch their buttocks, and the eggs get under their fingernails or on their fingertips. And, when they touch any object – a doorknob, a tap, the handrail of the stairs, a table, a pen – they put the eggs there, waiting for another child's hand to pick them up.

If that other child doesn't wash its hands before eating or, for example, sucks its fingers or bites its nails, it swallows some eggs (which have come out of another child's bottom!) and the worms start to grow in its intestines too: the child has been infected. (Mario quickly looks at his hands and hides them under the table: he has been found out.... he bites his nails!!!!)

Hearing this, Mario's father remembers that Elena, a few days before, had itching and irritation in the area where the girls pee. Her parents thought it was because at school she didn't dry the droplets after peeing, and that this dampness had given her irritation.

But the doctor explained to them that, in girls, the female worms sometimes get lost and go forward, and the itching bothers them a lot too.

The paediatrician tells them that it is very easy to spread the worm infection within the family, so all four of them will have to be treated, and also their grandmother, who has visited them during the last two weeks.

As both twins have symptoms, it is quite clear what is happening, and no further tests are needed. She writes down a prescription for the syrup for the twins and the tablets for the parents.

'A very short treatment. It will be repeated two weeks later. Grandma too, even if she has already gone back to her village! But also... you have to change underwear, pyjamas and sheets on the day of the treatment, and clean the house. And brush your nails with a soft brush and soap when you wash your hands.'

Still: there is the matter of Mario's nails: he will often get worms again if he keeps biting them. The paediatrician also gives him some tips for this. And Mario decides to give it a try.

They go home very happy, confident that everything will be solved easily.