

The Parasite Menace

"I read your book, The Parasite Menace and would like to say that it is a great book. Thank you for writing it. I learned a lot and it made a lot of sense to me. I wish my doctor would read your book. It would have saved me a lot of pain and frustration that I have experienced for so many years." Email from Vicky in Canada.

"I want to thank you personally for the very excellent book you recently wrote. What a fantastic piece of work. I very much appreciate your fact-based style and comprehensiveness. Thanks for the time and effort you put into this book." Email from E. Miller in Arizona.

You have probably never seen a parasite, so why worry about them? Parasites are among the six most harmful diseases that infect humans in the world today. Many people overlook the possibility of parasites as the cause of their illness.

Today, you don't have to travel to foreign countries to acquire their parasites. You can get amebas, pinworms, whipworms, tapeworms and a host of others critters, without ever getting a passport. The United States has enjoyed a very high standard of living compared with the rest of the world, yet people living in some parts of this country, especially in the warmer, humid climates, have an infection rate that exceeds 25%. Because of this misconception, many people have overlooked the possibility of parasites as the cause of their illness.

In many cases, people recognize the names of parasites such as tapeworms and pinworms, but they don't even come close to being aware of the variety and quantity present in the population as a whole. Common parasite sizes range from very small microscopic amebas to very large intestinal worms that can grow to several feet long. Over 100 common types of human parasites are known and humans can host more than one kind at a time. These potentially harmful parasites, and their effects, are increasing at a rapid rate as the cause of ill health in this country. Parasites should be an important part of every medical evaluation in cases of illness.

How Do We Get Parasites?

Parasites live everywhere and are commonly transmitted to humans in diverse ways such as insect bites, walking barefoot in warm and sandy soils, eating under-cooked meats and fish. What about salads, or even raw fruits and vegetables? Eating foods raw always increase the risk for parasites. The U.S. imports 30 billion tons of food a year. Some of the produce comes from developing nations where sanitation facilities are less advanced. This lack of personal hygiene may be one of the greatest factors in the spread of parasites.

Parasites can also get into the body by putting hands in the mouth after being in contact with something that has the parasite in or on it. This could be by shaking hands, sharing drinks, kissing, and even inhaling dust that contains the eggs or cysts of these organisms. It is also possible to get parasites from drinking water from many of the lakes, rivers, streams, and creeks. Close contact with companion pets and other animals is another way to acquire parasites.

What Does a Parasite Eat?

Some organisms just love sugar or other simple carbohydrates. If you also love sugar, then it would stand to reason that this is the kind of parasite you would attract. The parasites often eat the nutrients in your body before you get to use them. Parasites can remain in your body robbing it of nutrients for many years; some have a life span of 20 to 30 years. This means that you could have eaten contaminated food 10 years ago and still harbor the same organism, or their descendents, somewhere in your digestive tract.

Commonly Found Parasites

In the United States, the most common human parasites, apart from head lice, are the microscopic protozoa varieties such as *Giardia lamblia*. It is found in the waters of lakes, streams,

and oceans, and is a common cause of diarrhea. *Entamoeba histolytica* causes dysentery and injury to the liver and lungs. *Blastocystis hominis* is linked to acute and chronic illness, and *Dientamoeba fragilis* is associated with diarrhea, abdominal pains, intense anal itching, and loose stools. *Cryptosporidium* has become a significant threat to those with low immune function or with AIDS. Then there are the parasitic worms, including pinworms, roundworms, and tapeworms. These are usually acquired from eating contaminated meat.

Where Do Parasites Live?

There is no part of the human host that is not visited by some type of parasitic animal at some time or other during a person's life. No organ is immune: blood, muscles, heart, lungs, or brain. They are all possible sites for parasitic infestation. About one-third of the parasites in humans live in the digestive tract, and the other two-thirds live somewhere else in the body. Sometimes, the same parasite can move to many different parts of the body.

Is This Parasite A Pathogen?

Sometimes it's hard to know if a parasite is actually a pathogen or not. Just a few decades ago *Giardia lamblia*, now the leading cause of intestinal parasitic infections in the United States, was not considered a pathogen at all. Now it is! *Cryptosporidium* was considered a pathogen in animals, now it is also one in humans. Today, *Blastocystis hominis* is often considered a pathogen, if the quantities are high enough in the host's immune system. *Blastocystis hominis*, along with some forms of yeast, is often the most frequently found organism in stool samples.

Travel Brings Us Closer

Our world has become a global village now that we can get on a plane and fly anywhere in the world. Whenever we spend time in foreign lands it is possible to become infected with pathogens and then bring them back home with us. There is also an increase in immigration of people into the United States. Our lifestyles allow us to eat out, camp in the woods by beautiful streams, put our children in daycare centers, have close contact with our pets. All of these things put us at a high risk of getting parasites and spreading them all around the world. Soldiers stationed overseas pick up a variety of parasites and bring them home with them to infect their family and friends. Young children are at high risk of getting parasites, because they spend so much of their time putting their unwashed hands in their mouths.

What Are Some Of The Symptoms?

In the United States, diarrhea caused by intestinal parasites is the third leading cause of illness. It is amazing that so many people think that having diarrhea or other digestive problems, gas, constipation, skin rashes, pain in the stomach area, bloating, fatigue, and other vague symptoms, is just something they have to live with. These symptoms can come from anywhere in the body because parasites can occur anywhere. Parasitic infections can contribute to a variety of major diseases including Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, arthritis, and rheumatoid symptoms. They could be linked to food or environmental allergies that develop for no apparent reason.

Many parasites go undetected because they do not produce any serious symptoms, or only produce symptoms at one stage in their lives. It is easy to attribute feeling ill to other causes because parasitic infection can look like a hundred other conditions. Whether you are currently feeling sick or not, you may be harboring parasites. Remember, most people are unaware that these organisms are living inside them.