

Parasites: Hidden Danger

By J. Griffin

A parasite is defined as "a plant or animal that lives upon or within another living organism at whose expense it obtains some advantage". However, the type of parasites that you should be most concerned with are the single-celled organisms that may be making your body their home even as you read this. The Chief of the Laboratory for *Parasitic Diseases of the National Institute of Health* recently spoke to the media about the public's lack of awareness of the parasite epidemic in the United States. He stated that you are now more likely to contract a parasitic infection in this country than in Africa.

Common Symptoms of Parasitic Infections

- Fatigue
- Night Sweats
- Diarrhea
- Bloating
- Cramps
- Weight gain
- Muscle Loss

Although parasites were hardly found in the United States 50 years ago, the recent influx of immigrants, as well as increases in transnational commerce and travel, has brought organisms across our borders that previously were almost nonexistent. Two parasites that have invaded the U.S. quite successfully are *Giardia Lamblia*, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Entamoeba histolytica*. They are easily ingested and *Entamoeba Histolytica* is now the second-leading cause of death worldwide.

The Damage Done

Parasitic symptoms range from mild digestive problems like diarrhea, to severe muscle and tissue damage, and even death. However, the most troubling thing about parasites is that you may not even know you have them. Although there may be no obvious symptoms, parasites can steal vital nutrients from the foods and supplements your body needs. Over time, nutrient deficiencies can result in chronic diseases, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.

Nutrient deficiency resulting from parasite infections is now one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Parasites can also lead to autoimmune disease. If you host a parasite long enough, your body may not be able to differentiate between it and the healthy tissue in which it is living. The body then begins to attack itself as if it were an invading pathogen. This painful and tragic disorder can often be avoided if the parasite is found and treated in a timely and effective manner.

Where do you get parasites?

Parasites can be contracted in numerous ways. Walking barefoot in public areas, swimming in public pools, using restrooms, and insect bites - all can lead to parasitic infections. However, consumption of contaminated water and food is by far the most likely way to become infected. Tests of U.S. water supplies show that over 40 million people are exposed to *Giardia Lamblia* from government water supplies, and this is in pretreated chlorinated and filtered water. In addition, the *Natural Resource Defense Council* issued a report stating that most bottled water is no better than the contaminated water supplies found to contain *Giardia*.

Restaurants are another easy way to pick up parasitic infections. Parasites are easily spread by unhygienic food handlers, chefs, waiters, and especially patrons at salad bars and buffets, where numerous people are in contact with the food. But it is not just dining out that you should be concerned with. Supermarket fruits and vegetables that are not adequately washed

and cleaned can contain alive and viable parasitic cysts. Partially cooked meats can be even worse. Based on recent studies, the USDA estimates that raw ground beef produced at federally inspected plants has these contamination rates for dangerous parasites: *Clostridium perfringens*, 18.8%; *Staphylococcus aureus*, 30.5%; *Listeria monocytogenes*, 18%; *Campylobacter jejuni/coli*, 0.2%; *Salmonella*, 4.3%; and *Escherichia coli*, less than 0.2%.

Similarly, raw ground chicken had the following contamination rates: *Clostridium perfringens*, 45%; *Staphylococcus aureus*, 78.3%; *Listeria monocytogenes*, 36.4%; *Campylobacter jejuni/coli*, 58.6%; *Salmonella*, 41.9%; and *Escherichia coli*, less than 0.6. While these numbers should be interpreted broadly because cleanliness varies from facility to facility, they do highlight the importance of taking precautions when handling and cooking meat. The bottom line is that raw meats on supermarket shelves can be contaminated. Since they so frequently contain harmful bacteria, meats must always be properly cooked to ensure its safe consumption.

Prevention

The most effective thing you can do to prevent a parasitic infection is to wash your hands several times throughout the day. The vast majority (85% to 95%) of reported cases of food-borne illness are caused by food handling errors in the home or by workers in a restaurant or commercial kitchen. Without passing a single new law or hiring any additional government inspectors, food-borne illness could be reduced by up 90% if everyone learned simple safe food handling and preparation procedures. These include thoroughly skinning and washing all fruits and vegetables you plan to eat, freezing and cooking meat thoroughly to kill all possible microorganisms, and making sure not to eat at buffets and salad bars where food has been sitting out for long periods of time.

They Say...

85% of adult North Americans are infected with parasites"

Dr. Hazel Parcels, Founder, Parcels Center of Santa Fe

"I believe the single most undiagnosed health challenge in the history of the human race is parasites. I realize that is a pretty brave statement, but it is based on my 20 years of experience with more than 20,000 patients."

Dr. Ross Anderson, N.D.

"We have a tremendous parasite problem right here in the U.S. It is just not being addressed."

Dr. Peter Wina, Chief of the Patho-Biology, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

"In terms of numbers there are more parasitic infections acquired in this country than in Africa."

-Dr. Frank Nova, Chief of the Laboratory for Parasitic Diseases of the National Institute of Health

It is also vital to keep your water supply clean if you wish to avoid parasites. Drinking bottled water is one option, but as stated previously, it may not be any better than water straight from the tap. Because most bottled water is not chlorinated, any bacteria already in the bottle can breed and multiply quite effectively, so try to buy fresh bottles whenever possible. Distilled bottled water is theoretically safer than other types, but there are as many bottled water qualities as there are bottles.

Water filters are another option. Activated carbon filters are excellent at removing organic contamination and pesticides from water. However, they do not remove inorganic chemicals or heavy metals like lead.

These require ceramic filters, which can also remove *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*, as well as rust and dirt. The main drawback with all filters is that they need to be changed and cleaned often. If they are not, they become a point of concentration and a breeding ground for the very contaminants they intend to remove.

Detection

The best way to avoid the negative impact that parasites can have on your life is to perform a parasitic diagnostic test. Such tests can accurately determine if you have parasites, what kind of parasites you have, and provide vital information your doctor needs to stop and eradicate parasites before they spread.

Unfortunately, there is no one defining symptom indicative of a parasitic infection. Fatigue, night sweats, irregular bowel movements, and stomach irritability are all possible signs of hosting a parasite. However, parasites may not manifest any symptoms until decades after infection, when the damage is substantial and possibly irreversible. The only concrete way to determine if you are infected is to perform a laboratory certified parasitic test. Such tests not only find parasites by performing a microscopy on stool samples, but new blood tests can also identify parasitic infections. The stool tests have now evolved to the point where they are simple and inexpensive and collection can be done in the privacy and comfort of your own home. Performing such tests is cost-effective and can prevent serious health problems from developing, saving lives.

Treatment

Although it is usually best to begin treating parasites as soon as possible, it is not advisable to undertake treatment on your own. Using anti-parasitic herbs, which are often not strong enough to kill parasites outright, can cause the parasites to delve deeper into the intestines and become harder to kill. This is especially true in gluten intolerant people. Because gluten intolerance causes inflammation and crevices in the gut, parasites may find a place to hide and remain safe from herbs and even antibiotics. That's why doing testing and working with a qualified healthcare professional is essential. The laboratory data can help your healthcare professional determine if there are other issues involved that may affect your treatment. By working with an expert you can kill parasites the first time, saving yourself money, time, and most importantly, your health