

## **The Parasite Menace**

**By Tracy Tranchitella, N.D.**

For many the discussion of parasites usually brings up images of malnourished people living in third world countries. However, most people do not realize that parasites are very common within the United States, and their presence within our food and water supply can lead to outbreaks of acute illness, which, if not treated properly, can contribute to many chronic conditions such as chronic fatigue, wasting syndromes, digestive problems, asthma, and more. Veterinarians know how prevalent parasitic infections are within our pet population and you will find that the field of veterinary medicine takes the presence of parasites very seriously.

Parasites are defined as "an organism that grows, feeds, and is sheltered in a different organism and contributes nothing to its host." Many are microscopic organisms that invade our gastrointestinal tract evading our immune system and eventually leading to chronic intestinal problems such as bloating, indigestion, pain, constipation, and poor nutrient absorption. Some parasites can live in our bodies for years robbing us of important vitamins and minerals and leading to chronic ill health. One common misconception people have about parasites is that if they have no intestinal symptoms, namely diarrhea than they think they cannot have an infection.

In my practice we have found parasites in a number of people who are without symptoms. Many of these people are quite surprised when they learn they have a parasite living in their body. However, most individuals we work with who are suffering with a chronic health problem such as chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, colitis, and even cancer knew that something was impeding their health. One parasite that is notorious for its ability to cause chronic ill-health is *Giardia lamblia*.

*Giardia* infects mostly the small intestine by attaching to the lining of the mucous membranes leading to problems of flatulence, abdominal cramps, nausea, and malabsorption. Infections can be high amongst day care populations, travelers, people with low stomach acid and immune system problems. In the U.S., giardiasis is one of the most common intestinal infections; about 7% of stools submitted for parasitologic examination contain *G. lamblia* cysts. *Giardia* is passed by fecal-oral route through contaminated food or water. Members living within the same household as someone with a known giardia infection should also be checked. This is also true of people infected with many of the parasites we diagnose such as *Cryptosporidium*, *Blastocystis hominis*, and *Entamoeba histolytica*.

BioHealth Diagnostics has developed a sophisticated testing program to help detect parasitic infections. Utilizing stool and blood testing for parasites has increased our yield of detection which has enabled me the opportunity to uncover the reason for many chronic health problems. Parasite detection is an important part of our work-up for individuals seeking improved health, and should be a consideration for any individual suffering with chronic ill-health. If you, a friend or family member have not been able to find answers to your health concerns, then an extensive analysis for parasites may be the key to recovery.

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