

Parasites

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A parasite is an organism that benefits by living off another organism at the expense of the host. This could therefore include bacteria, fungi and viruses. However, for the purposes of discussing parasites in this article, we will be referring to protozoa (single celled organisms), arthropods (insects), and worms that invade and feed off the host organism and in many cases, cause them harm. Symptoms can range from mild to serious and chronic.

It is estimated by the World Health Organization that 3.5 billion people suffer from some type of parasitic infection. People affected by such infections range from those in third world countries to developed nations. Many of these infections are highly contagious and can be transmitted through casual contact (i.e. something handled by an infected person can infect another person). Common sources and causes of parasitic infection include contaminated water, improperly washed or undercooked food, transmission from pets, and contact with another infected person. Other risk factors include travel and antibiotic usage, as they interfere with normal intestinal flora.

Parasites can range from microscopic single-cell protozoa to worms which are up to 15 feet long. The most common protozoan parasites in humans are *Giardia lamblia*, *Enteramoeba histolytica*, *Blastocystis hominis* and *Cryptosporidium*. These are primarily transmitted from contaminated food and water supplies and poor personal hygiene. The most common worms are pinworms, roundworms, tapeworms, hook worms, Guinea worms and filarial. These are primarily contracted from traveling to undeveloped regions, contaminated water, pets, meat and fish. Lastly, the most common arthropods, aside from head lice, are mites, ticks and fleas. These can carry other smaller cell-wall free bacteria like *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is responsible for Lyme's disease.

Acute parasitic infections are usually characterized by abdominal distress and diarrhea (with fluid loss). Acute cases can also result in lowered immunity, nutritional deficiencies, dehydration, weight loss, blackouts, muscular pain and blood sugar alterations. Only rarely is there any visible evidence of infection.

Most laboratories fail to detect the presence of parasites even when presented with specimens from infected persons.

Chronic parasitic infections have been linked to diseases such as chronic fatigue syndrome and arthritis. Once an infection has moved from acute to chronic, infected individuals may experience gastrointestinal symptoms such as: alternating periods of constipation and diarrhea, abdominal distention and bloating, and intestinal cramping. Therefore, chronic infections generally result in nutrient malabsorption (especially fatty foods), irritable bowel syndrome, food cravings and blood sugar fluctuations.

It should also be noted that many parasites affect the nervous system and can give rise to sleep disorders such as insomnia. In children, such infections can cause hyperactivity whereas in adults, symptoms of depression and anxiety may result. Some parasites can also affect the brain and memory. The part of the body affected depends on where the parasite has invaded: blood, intestines, liver, pancreas, kidneys, brain, etc. To complicate things further, many parasites migrate. Therefore, the symptoms they cause can change depending on which body part the parasite is affecting at any given time.

Treatment for parasites includes doing a parasite cleanse. In addition, you should cut out all sugar and white refined carbohydrates from your diet, as these feed parasites and encourage them to breed. Completely removing coffee, wheat and dairy can also irritate the gut when infected with a parasite. Consider drinking only pure filtered water. Foods that fight parasites include papaya, pomegranate, pineapple, raw garlic, fresh figs, onions, raw cabbage, kelp, blackberries, finely ground pumpkin seeds, ground almonds and coconut oil (parasites hate it). Foods that feed good bacteria in the gut such as bananas, leeks, and oats should be considered.

Lastly, some of the beneficial herbs used for parasites include *Artemisia annua* (used to expel pinworms and treat malaria), black walnut (used for worms and parasitic infections), cloves (antiseptic, bactericidal and antiparasitic), Pau D'Arco (antiparasitic), and goldenseal (malaria and parasites). SM