

Parasites: Part Two

In the previous health letter, a brief introduction to parasites was discussed. In this article, the different methods of passing parasites from one living thing to another will be outlined. The first of these are the blood-borne parasites, which are parasites that like to inhabit the blood stream. They may be transmitted from blood to blood (e.g. contaminated needles [Figure 1.] or blood transfusions). A specific type of a blood-borne parasite is protozoans and a common disease caused by protozoans is malaria (Figure 2.).



Figure 1. Parasites can be spread through contaminated needles.



Figure 2. A mosquito bite could cause malaria, a serious parasitic infectious disease.

From One Animal to Another

Parasitic infections may also be transferred from one animal to another. For example, certain animals (e.g. opossums, raccoons, skunks, bears, and deer), may roam the woods at night. If these parasite infected animals contaminate the environment, then during the daytime, when domestic animals (e.g. dogs and cats) dig through the contaminated soil and lick their paws, then the infection is transferred.

Another way parasites are spread is through contaminated water, even chlorinated water. When water sources become a drinking fountain for parasite infested creatures, it leads to problems for pets and humans. If dogs and cats play in contaminated water, then they also become infected. When humans accidentally swallow water, breath in water droplets, or have skin contact with contaminated swimming pools, spas, lakes, or any other sources of water, it may allow parasites to suppress the immune system and allow other problems to affect the body. These problems may consist of skin rashes, ear conditions, intestinal disorders, and lung or brain related problems. Intestinal conditions, such as severe diarrhea, may be life-threatening due to the high amount of fluid loss over a short period of time. In

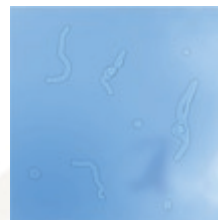


Figure 3. "Floaters" are an indication of parasites in the eye.

addition, the tiny sparkly particles people see through their eyes are called "floaters," and they are usually an indication of parasites in the body (Figure 3.).

Traveling Parasites

Parasites may also be transmitted during international travel due to the fact that there are many areas of the world where the water source is contaminated with

(continued)



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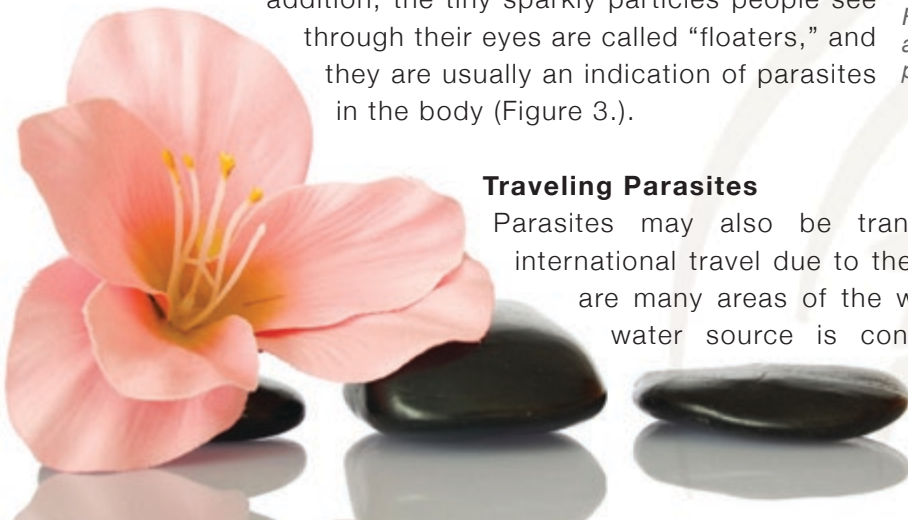
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parasites. If the water is used to prepare food, such as salads, then the person consuming the food will become ill. Also, if restaurant workers do not wash their hands properly after using the restroom, then the parasites may spread from their hands to the food that they prepare (Figure 4.) Certain mosquitoes, such as those from Africa, are responsible for causing a life threatening disease called Malaria.



Figure 4. The ascaris adult worm—commonly found in unsanitary areas

Preventing Parasites

While there are many ways of spreading parasites, there are also ways to prevent parasites from taking over the body. The first method is to avoid everything that has a possibility of transmitting parasites. This means not traveling to countries where parasites are prominent, not eating at restaurants, not hiking in the woods, and not swimming. The second method, which is a more practical approach, is to increase the body's own immune system. If the body is allowed to work at its highest level, it will be able to suppress parasites that enter the body. The immune system is stronger when the amount of stress in the body is minimal. For instance, psychological stress is one of the main causes of a weak immune system.



Figure 5. Getting a massage is a healthy way to cope with stress.

Stress Management

Stress management is important if the immune system must maintain its strength to fight off parasitic infections. The initial plan in managing stress is to identify the sources of stress in your life. An effective way of accomplishing this task is by keeping a daily stress journal. Next, it is important to discover how you are currently coping with stress and determine whether or not they are unhealthy (e.g. procrastinating, oversleeping, using drugs that help you relax, consuming excessive alcohol, using physical violence, etc. [Table 1.] or healthy ways (Table 2). There are many positive ways to handle stress. One way is to avoid unnecessary stress by avoiding people who make you feel stressed. Other ways including is better time management, listening to music, focusing on the positive aspects of your life, talking about your feelings with a friend, and obtaining at least seven hours of sleep everyday. As you can see, although the chances of catching a parasite may be high, learning how to handle stress will strengthen your immune system so that your body is able to fight off the infection.

Table 1. Unhealthy Ways to Cope with Stress

1.	Smoking
2.	Eating excessively
3.	Not eating enough
4.	Blanking out in front of a TV or computer
5.	Isolating from family and friends

Table 2. Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress

1.	Decrease caffeine and sugar intake
2.	Exercising on a regular basis
3.	Eating healthy
4.	Maintain a sense of humor
5.	Get a massage! (Figure 5.)

(http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm)



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