

TAPEWORM



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A parasitic infection of the digestive tract or other organs. Tapeworms are typically acquired from eating undercooked meat or fish.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Most people with this problem have no symptoms.
- Pain in the upper abdomen.
- Diarrhea.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Symptoms of anemia (weakness, fatigue, and shortness of breath).
- Bowel movements containing worm eggs and worm body parts.

CAUSES

- Parasites: *Taenia saginata* from beef, *Taenia solium* from pork, and *Diphyllobothrium* from fish. People become infected by eating improperly cooked or raw food infected with the parasite.
- *Echinococcus* tapeworm is found in dogs and some livestock (often in sheep). Humans can get an infection (echinococcosis) from this tapeworm. Infected dogs leave feces in soil or water. Humans are infected by eating food grown in the soil or drinking the water. It can also be spread by handling an infected dog or livestock. The infection causes cysts (sores), usually in the liver. Symptoms may not develop for 10 to 20 years after exposure.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Travel to places such as Asia, Africa, or Latin America. This disorder is uncommon in the United States.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Cook beef, pork, and fish thoroughly. Additional information available from the National Center for Nutrition (800) 366-1655 or the Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline (800) 535-4555.
- Buy only meat that has been inspected.
- Wash your hands after handling any raw meat or fish.
- Keep pet dogs clean and dewormed. Wash hands after handling pets or livestock.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with appropriate treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Cysticercosis, a more widespread infection from tapeworm larvae (rare).
- Obstruction of intestine (rare).
- Echinococcosis can cause severe health problems including death.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider may do a physical exam. Medical tests usually include a study of a stool sample to check for eggs or worms. If echinococcosis is suspected, an x-ray or blood study may be done.
- The usual treatment is with drugs.
- Cysts from echinococcosis infection may need to be removed surgically.
- Have all family members examined for possible infection.

MEDICATIONS

Anthelmintic drug to kill the parasite. The drug can cure with a single dose. Medical tests should be repeated in 3 to 6 weeks to make sure the disorder is cured.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of a tapeworm.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page