

Centre for Natural Medicine

PARASITES

by Dean Schrader ND

Recently a woman in her 30's (we will call her Trish which is not her real name) came to the Centre for Natural Medicine to see if anything could be done about her health issues. She was desperate--- the abdominal pain, gas, bloating and diarrhea were interfering with her everyday activities. She was missing so much work that she was fearful of losing her job. She did not go out socially for the fear of not finding a bathroom in time. She knew every public restroom between her house and her workplace.

Trish had been suffering with these gastrointestinal issues along with profound fatigue, inability to concentrate, weight loss and food intolerances for over 2 years. Appropriate laboratory tests, such as a barium x-ray, colonoscopy, endoscopy and stool parasite tests had ruled out serious conditions such as Crohn's, ulcerative colitis and colon cancer. Trish was given the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome.

Suspecting that Trish had a microbial imbalance in her intestines, likely due to a parasite, I recommended a laboratory test that identifies several underlying causes of gastrointestinal (GI) problems. Stool parasite tests, called an O and P (ova and parasite); often fail to detect a parasite. Eggs and parasites often cling or embed in the intestinal wall and are not released with every bowel movement. Other lab tests utilizing different technology look for antigens from parasites or antibodies specific to certain parasites. Antigens are protein molecules that are specific to an organism. Antibodies are produced by the body to eradicate the antigen. In the case of Trish, one of the parasites found was an organism called amoeba histolytica. The lab detected amoeba histolytica antibodies. Although antibodies to amoeba histolytica were being produced, she was losing the battle to rid the body of the amoeba histolytica antigen and ultimately the parasite.

DIAGNOSING PARASITES:

The comprehensive GI test also serves to diagnose or identify other issues that maybe present. Food intolerances (ie. egg, soy, dairy, gluten), pancreatic enzyme output, quantitative fungal imbalances (candida, etc.), bacterial flora (“good” and “bad”), GI inflammation, hidden blood, and stool pH, are among the other tests included in the GI panel. Trish also was positive for cryptosporidium (another parasite), a moderate amount of candida (a fungus), and an egg and dairy intolerance. Trish’s presentation of symptoms is not atypical. Not only are physical symptoms associated with parasites, mental and emotional symptoms can also be a manifestation of a microbial (parasite, bacterial, fungal) imbalance.

PARASITE INCIDENCE:

There is a wide discrepancy regarding the incidence of parasites in North America. I have read anywhere from a few percent of the population to nearly 100% of the population having parasites. As usual, the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. Although the exact prevalence of parasites in Canada and the U.S. is difficult to quantify, advanced detection methods using accurate and sophisticated equipment, will help to determine a more precise incidence of parasites. One survey of stool specimens submitted to Great Smokies laboratory in the U.S. found nearly 30% of specimens testing positive for parasites. Worldwide, diarrheal diseases caused by bacteria and parasites constitute the greatest worldwide cause of morbidity and mortality. Poor sanitation and hygiene is primarily responsible for the near 100% incidence of parasitic infection in undeveloped countries.

TREATMENT:

In order to achieve the quickest, most effective results, it is important to determine the organism involved. Most parasites will respond to natural therapies. In general, herbal medications (vs. pharmaceutical medications) used for parasites may take a few more weeks to eradicate the organism, with fewer adverse effects. Allicin (from garlic), berberis, quassia, clove, cinnamon, artemesia, and black walnut are some of the botanical medication traditionally used in treating parasites. As previously mentioned, matching the appropriate herb with the organism enhances the results.

Probiotics or friendly bacteria and adequate stomach acid can help to protect against future parasites and abnormal bacterial/fungal imbalances.

HERXHEIMER REACTION:

When there is a die-off of parasites (or other abnormal or pathogenic organisms) symptoms similar to the flu may occur. This reaction is referred to as a herxheimer reaction. Though sometimes an unpleasant experience, it is often a necessary step to healing. Depending on the symptom, there are often other adjunctive natural therapies that can dampen these symptoms.

Within 6 weeks, Trish's symptoms were gone and have not returned. "I haven't felt this good for over 10 years", Trish stated on her second follow up. Though Trish's primary symptoms were plaguing her for 2 years, she was often fatigued prior to this time. Needless to say, she was very pleased to have her health return to an optimal state.

Playing a part in restoring a sense of wellbeing to patients is what fuels us as practitioners. Eradicating parasites and other unfriendly organisms is a key to restoring patient's health. Utilizing advanced diagnostic procedures and prescribing appropriate medications expedites this process. Trish no longer misses work due to absence. She embraces life outside of work and continues to enjoy the health and freedom associated with optimal health.