Taeniasis (Tapeworms)
Intestinal Tapeworm Infections

Four different species of tapeworms (*cestodes*) cause almost all human infections that are limited to the inside of the intestines or bowels. Their scientific names are:

- Diphyllobothrium latum (fish tapeworm).
- Taenia saginata (beef tapeworm).
- Taenia solium (pork tapeworm).
- Hymenolepis nana (dwarf tapeworm).

All except the dwarf tapeworm are acquired by eating raw or undercooked meat from the meat source that the name indicates (fish, beef or pork). You get dwarf tapeworm by eating or ingesting the Hymenolepis eggs on or in any food contaminated by stool from another infected person. All except pork tapeworm infections never travel outside of the bowel in humans. People who ingest human stool or feces contaminated with pork tapeworm eggs can develop a disease called cysticercosis. Infected persons have multiple cysts in many parts of the body. Severe disease caused by these cysts may develop when the brain is involved.

SYMPTOMS

Most people with tapeworms that are limited to the intestine have no symptoms. When a large number of worms are present, abdominal cramps or diarrhea may occur. Severe fish tapeworm infection may cause anemia. When infections are very severe, this anemia may be associated with an injury to the nervous system. With some tapeworm infections, a person may see a moving ribbonlike structure in their feces. If you see this go to your healthcare provider.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver will look at the tapeworm using a microscope. This will help them decide what kind of tapeworm it is. Detection of antibodies to the tapeworm in the blood may also be useful but is rarely ordered.

TREATMENT

Treatment is simple and effective. Two different drugs are available by prescription from a doctor:

- Niclosamide.
- Praziquantel.

Both are taken by mouth and as a single dose. A higher dose of praziquantel may be used to treat dwarf tapeworm infection. A discussion with your healthcare provider is needed to determine which drug is best for a given infected patient.

PREVENTION

The best ways to prevent tapeworms are to make sure:

- All fish and animal meat is cooked properly.
- Use proper hygiene are followed. Hand washing is one example.

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