Trichinosis

Trichinosis is an infection caused by eating the raw, or poorly cooked, meat of meat eating animals that are infected. The infection is caused by eating the encysted larvae (like a small egg with a tiny worm inside) of the nematode (very small worm) called Trichinella spiralis. It is found in the infected meat of these animals. The seriousness of the disease is usually related to the number of larvae eaten. Once the cyst is in the intestines, the larva is released. These tiny worms then enter the small blood vessels in the intestines and travel throughout the body. They can infect all tissues of the body.

SYMPTOMS

When the larvae are in the intestine, they can cause diarrhea and *abdominal* (belly) pain. There may be swelling around the eyes and muscle aches and pains. The diaphragm (breathing muscle between the chest and abdomen), chest muscles between the ribs, and the muscles of the face and the tongue are also affected. This disease is usually self limited. That means you will usually get well in time without treatment. It can rarely result in death only if there are complications from heavy invasion of the heart, lungs, or central nervous system (brain and spinal cord).

DIAGNOSIS

Laboratory blood tests are available that can usually make a positive diagnosis. Examining the infected muscle under the microscope may also help with the diagnosis. If laboratory work is performed, make sure you know how you are to obtain the results. **It is your responsibility** to follow up and obtain your laboratory results.

TREATMENT

- There is no known treatment for Trichinosis except for treatment of symptoms. Usually anti-inflammatory medications are used.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver. Discontinue immediately if you have stomach upset. Take medicine only as directed by your caregiver.
- Thiabendazole is used as a medication for known exposure. Steroids are also used for severe cases.
- Most symptoms will get better on their own within a year without lasting problems. However, you will be infected for the rest of your life. You cannot pass this infection on to another person even with close personal contact.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You develop any new symptoms such as vomiting, severe headache, stiff or painful neck, chest pain, shortness of breath, trouble breathing, or develop pain uncontrolled with medications.
- You develop new problems or worsening of the problems that originally brought you in for care.

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