



Long-Term Effects of Congenital Toxoplasmosis

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DESCRIPTION

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by the single-celled parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. The disease is common in humans and many other warm-blooded animals. It is estimated that 30%-40% of all Americans have the parasite. Cats, including wild breeds, are the only animals that harbour adult parasites in their gut. These adult parasites produce oocysts (eggs) that are excreted in the cat's faeces. These eggs need to develop in the environment for 1-5 days before becoming infective and can remain infective in cat soil and feces for up to 18 months. When other animals or humans are infected with this parasite, cysts form in tissues (muscle, brain, etc.), but adult parasites do not develop in the intestinal tract. Animals other than cats do not shed eggs in their faeces, but the cycle continues when tissue from an infected animal is eaten by another susceptible animal or person.

Toxoplasmosis is usually acquired by eating undercooked food containing cysts, coming into contact with infected cat feces, or being passed from an infected woman to her baby during pregnancy. Rarely, the disease is transmitted by blood transfusion. It is not spread among people in any other way. This parasite is known to reproduce sexually only in cats. However, it can infect warm-blooded animals of most species, including humans. Diagnosis is usually made by blood tests for antibodies or amniocentesis in pregnant women for parasite DNA.

Prevention is through proper preparation and cooking of food. Pregnant women are also advised not to clean the toilet or, if necessary, to wear gloves and wash their hands afterwards. In otherwise healthy people, no treatment is usually required. Spiramycin or pyrimethamine/sulfadiazine and folic acid can be used for treatment during pregnancy.

Up to half of the world's population is infected with toxoplasmosis but has no symptoms. About 11% of people in the United States are infected, and in some parts of the world he is over 60% infected. About 200,000 cases of congenital toxoplasmosis occur each year. Charles Nicolle and Louis Manceaux first described the organism in 1908. Transmission from a pregnant mother to her baby was confirmed in 1941.

There is preliminary evidence that infection can affect human behavior.

You may not know whether you are infected or not. Often there are no symptoms. Some people feel like they have the flu. Symptoms include:

- Achy muscles
- Headache
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Fever
- Swollen glands
- Blurry vision
- Eye redness

These symptoms may last for a month or more. If you think you have toxoplasmosis, talk to your doctor. Your doctor can do blood tests to see if you have an infection. Blood tests are an integral part of prenatal care, but testing for toxoplasmosis is not usually done. Therefore, if you think you are infected, be sure to consult your provider.

Here's how to protect ourselves from toxoplasmosis:

- Do not eat raw, insufficient or contaminated meat, especially lamb, pork, or venison. The cooked meat must not be pink and the gravy must be transparent. Before eating, check the meat temperature with a meat thermometer.
- Don't eat raw, undercooked or contaminated shellfish, such as oysters, clams or mussels.
- Do not drink raw milk, especially goat's milk.
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling fruits, vegetables or raw meat, poultry (such as chicken or turkey) or shellfish.
- Don't touch the eyes, nose or mouth when handling raw meat.
- Clean cutting boards, work surfaces and utensils with hot, soapy water after using them with fruits, vegetables or raw meat.
- Peel or thoroughly wash all raw fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Use work gloves when gardening.

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Received: 29-Jul-2022, Manuscript No. JBP-22-18083; **Editor assigned:** 01-Aug-2022, PreQC No. JBP-22-18083 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 16-Aug-2022, QC No. JBP-22-18083; **Revised:** 23-Aug-2022, Manuscript No. JBP-22-18083 (R); **Published:** 30-Aug-2022, DOI: 10.35248/2155-9597.22.S17.017.

Citation: Vander B (2022) Long-Term Effects of Congenital Toxoplasmosis. J Bacteriol Parasitol. S17:017.

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