

GASTROINTESTINAL PARASITES

Where do you get Gastrointestinal parasites from?

Like all organ systems of the body the gastrointestinal tract can be infected by parasites. These can be acquired from overseas travel to Third World countries but are also frequent even in Australians who have never been overseas. These infections can be chronic and indolent and can often mimic other diseases.

What problems can result from parasite infection?

Infections such as hookworm are a common cause worldwide of iron deficiency anaemia.

Giardia is a frequent cause of acute gastroenteritis and is associated with sulphurous malodorous loose stool, flatulence and burping.

Other parasites such as *Dientamoeba fragilis*, *Blastocystis hominis* and *Entamoeba histolytica* can closely mimic symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome.

How are parasite infections detected?

Unless appropriate tests are done parasite infections can frequently be missed. As an example, to assess for parasites of the bowel a normal stool culture performed through a pathology laboratory is inadequate. On the other hand a special saline acid fixation stool test is accurate in assessing for stool parasites. Here the stool is embalmed in a special liquid and the cysts, ova and casts can be identified by an experienced technician or Microbiologist. For this reason all patients with irritable bowel like symptoms should have a specific stool parasite test.

Who should I see if I suspect I have a parasite infection?

If you are suspecting parasites of the gastrointestinal tract, you should discuss this with your General Practitioner or Gastroenterologist.