



## ***Trichinellosis*** **(TRICK-a-NELL-o-sis)**

### **What is trichinellosis?**

Trichinellosis, also called trichinosis, is caused by eating raw or undercooked meat of animals infected with the larvae of a species of worm called *Trichinella*. Infection occurs commonly in certain wild carnivorous (meat-eating) animals but may also occur in domestic pigs.

### **What are the symptoms of a trichinellosis infection?**

Nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, fatigue, fever, and abdominal discomfort are the first symptoms of trichinellosis. Headaches, fevers, chills, cough, eye swelling, aching joints and muscle pains, itchy skin, diarrhea, or constipation follow the first symptoms. If the infection is heavy, patients may experience difficulty coordinating movements, and have heart and breathing problems. In severe cases, death can occur.

For mild to moderate infections, most symptoms subside within a few months. Fatigue, weakness, and diarrhea may last for months.

### **How soon after infection will symptoms appear?**

Abdominal symptoms can occur 1-2 days after infection. Further symptoms usually start 2-8 weeks after eating contaminated meat. Symptoms may range from very mild to severe and relate to the number of infectious worms consumed in meat. Often, mild cases of trichinellosis are never specifically diagnosed and are assumed to be the flu or other common illnesses.

### **How does infection occur in humans and animals?**

When a human or animal eats meat that contains infective *Trichinella* cysts, the acid in the stomach dissolves the hard covering of the cyst and releases the worms. The worms pass into the small intestine and, in 1-2 days, become mature. After mating, adult females lay eggs. Eggs develop into immature worms, travel through the arteries, and are transported to muscles. Within the muscles, the worms curl into a ball and encyst (become enclosed in a capsule). Infection occurs when these encysted worms are consumed in meat.

### **Am I at risk for trichinellosis?**

If you eat raw or undercooked meats, particularly bear, pork, wild feline (such as a cougar), fox, dog, wolf, horse, seal, or walrus, you are at risk for trichinellosis.

### **Can I spread trichinellosis to others?**

No. Infection can only occur by eating raw or undercooked meat containing *Trichinella* worms.

**What should I do if I think I have trichinellosis?**

See your health care provider who can order tests and treat symptoms of trichinellosis infection. If you have eaten raw or undercooked meat, you should tell your health care provider.

**How is trichinellosis infection diagnosed?**

A blood test or muscle biopsy can show if you have trichinellosis.

**How is trichinellosis infection treated?**

Several safe and effective prescription drugs are available to treat trichinellosis. Treatment should begin as soon as possible and the decision to treat is based upon symptoms, exposure to raw or undercooked meat, and laboratory test results.

**Is trichinellosis common in the United States?**

Infection was once very common and usually caused by ingestion of undercooked pork. However, infection is now relatively rare. During 1997-2001, an average of 12 cases per year were reported. The number of cases has decreased because of legislation prohibiting the feeding of raw-meat garbage to hogs, commercial and home freezing of pork, and the public awareness of the danger of eating raw or undercooked pork products. Cases are less commonly associated with pork products and more often associated with eating raw or undercooked wild game meats.

**How can I prevent trichinellosis?**

- Cook meat products until the juices run clear or to an internal temperature of 170°F.
- Freeze pork less than 6 inches thick for 20 days at 5°F to kill any worms.
- Cook wild game meat thoroughly. Freezing wild game meats, unlike freezing pork products, even for long periods of time, may not effectively kill all worms.
- Cook all meat fed to pigs or other wild animals.
- Do not allow hogs to eat uncooked carcasses of other animals, including rats, which may be infected with trichinellosis.
- Clean meat grinders thoroughly if you prepare your own ground meats.
- Curing (salting), drying, smoking, or microwaving meat does not consistently kill infective worms.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have a parasitic infection, consult a health care provider.*



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