

A Little About Worms and Albendazole

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When we discover worms in our stored food we are grossed out and immediately discard that wormy food. Imagine the reaction of a person who discovers that he/she is “wormy.” Worms do debilitate not only the physical body but also the mental state of the person affected.

Worms thrive in the warmer climates of the earth. Unfortunately, these are the areas of most of the world’s poverty. This poverty is accentuated by the presence of worms that cause the depletion of already scarce nutrients in the body.

Worms enter the body in various ways. Some such as the hookworm enter through the feet. Others enter through the mouth in their egg cycle. They all end up feeding off their host. Some feed on blood and others from the nutrients in the digestive system. Those that feed on blood (like the hookworm) may cause anemia if their intake is large. One of the routes that worms take in their cycle can be via the blood through the lungs where they can be coughed up at which point they pass into the esophagus and from there into the digestive system. There they grow and become heavy feeders. The large *Ascaris* worm, due to its large size and numbers present, can consume up to 25% to 30% of a child’s daily intake of food.

Albendazole treats the three parasitic worms that cause the great majority of damage in humans—the roundworm, the hookworm, and the whipworm. It is not effective against the tapeworm. By far the most damaging of the three is the largest of the roundworms which goes by the name “*Ascaris*.” Children have been found with very high numbers of these worms in their systems. Since a child usually eats about one pound of food per day one can calculate that, on average, ridding a child of these worms saves at least one ounce of food per day. That calculates to about 20 lbs. of food over the six month period the pill is effective.

Studies in Ecuador have shown that in the mountain areas about 78% of the children are infected. Along the seacoast the rate is 93%. In Zanzibar (off the coast of Tanzania) the infection rate is above 99%. From those data one could say that the rate for the rest of the poor countries of the world would probably have an infection rate

above 80%. It is known that one fourth to one third of the world suffers from worms to some degree and Ascaris is the main culprit.

The second most prevalent worm is the hookworm and Albendazole does treat this as well. The third is the whipworm. This is the worm that infects the anal area and also lives in the intestines from the blood of the host. It (along with the hookworm) causes a very low blood count which is externally visible in a pale, unhealthy looking skin. It is the cause of anal prolapses. Because they live on blood it can also cause a very low blood count in an expectant mother which makes for a very unhealthy baby. A child can be born already infected because, like AIDS, one of the stages of a worm can pass through the placenta to the unborn child.

One female Ascaris worm will lay about 200,000 eggs per day. These eggs are passed via the fecal matter and picked up in the soil especially by children. If their hands are not clean they ingest these eggs and the cycle starts all over again. One of the worst results of the Ascaris worm is that they can exit any orifice of the body and there are numerous cases of worms choking a child as they pass out the nose and mouth. The worms also cause intestinal blockages.

This medication does not completely rid a child of worms but it treats the adult stage of the worms which is the stage where most of the food is consumed. Thus it diminishes the worm burden by the fact that it takes about six months for the cycle to complete itself. That's why it is recommended that the pill be administered every six months.