



TAPEWORM PARASITISM

ABOUT THE DISEASE

Tapeworm parasitism in canine and feline patients is most commonly caused by *Dipylidium caninum*, which is transmitted by eating infected fleas or lice. There are several other species of **tapeworms** (*Taenia* species for example), which can be transmitted if canine and feline patients ingest tissues from infected rabbits, mice, or even some farm animals.

Tapeworms are approximately 6-8 inches in length and shed small segments of their bodies into the stool, which appear similar to white grains of rice. Each of these packets contains microscopic eggs, which are not directly infectious to mammals. These packets of eggs must mature in a host, such as fleas or lice, before they can infect mammals.

Once infecting the intestines, **tapeworms** live by feeding off digested food passing through the intestinal tract. These parasites are relatively harmless and rarely cause more than a loss of body weight.

Tapeworms can technically be transmitted to humans (zoonotic), but only occur when humans ingest raw or undercooked meat and fish.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Tapeworm eggs are contained within the parasite body segments and are not typically seen on routine fecal floatation. Most patients are diagnosed because the tapeworm body segments are easily visible in the stool.

TREATMENT

Tapeworms are not covered by routine dewormers, but medications such as praziquantel and epsiquantel are the most effective treatment for all species of **tapeworms**.

Patients infected with the *Taenia* species of **tapeworms** may be treated with febendazole, but this medication does not cover *Dipylidium caninum*.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- The most effective means of **tapeworm** control is providing routine ectoparasite (flea and lice) control.