Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a germ called a protozoan. People and household pets can get toxoplasmosis. The germ that causes it is found in raw or undercooked meats. It may also be found in unwashed vegetables and fruits or unpasteurized milk. Cat stool may also contain the germ. Toxoplasmosis usually enters the body when the person eats something with the germ in it.

Signs

Most people do not have signs or only have mild flu-like signs of illness. Signs may last a few weeks and then go away, but the germ stays in the body in an inactive state. Signs may include:

- Headache
- Fever greater than 101 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius
- Feel tired or weak
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches or pain

Pregnant women, people with a weak immune system, or those with a chronic medical condition are at risk for severe signs of illness. If pregnant, infection can pass to the baby. The severe signs of illness are:

- Confusion
- Nausea
- Slurred speech
- Eye problems or blurred vision
- Fever
- Headaches
- Problems with coordination
- Seizures

Learn more about your health care.
Diagnosis
Your doctor will check your signs and blood tests may be done. You may also have special x-rays taken of your head. One type of x-ray is called a computed tomography (CT) scan. You may also have a scan called magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Your doctor will tell you which test is best for diagnosis.

Treatment
Medicines can be used to treat toxoplasmosis. They will not cure the infection, but can reduce signs. Long term medicine therapy may be needed for persons with weak immune systems or chronic conditions. If the medicines cause side effects, talk with your doctor before stopping any medicine. Finish all medicine as directed. Follow up visits are important, so your doctor can see how the medicines are working.

To keep your immune system healthy, eat a well balanced diet, get enough rest, exercise regularly, and manage stress in your life.

Prevention
Toxoplasmosis is a disease that can be prevented:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid raw or undercooked meats. Cook to at least 150 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating or cooking.
- Clean kitchen utensils and surfaces with hot and soapy water to avoid cross contamination.
- If pregnant or have a weak immune system, avoid changing cat litter or gardening. If that is not possible, wear gloves and a mask for protection. Change the cat litter daily and remove stools to keep your environment clean.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.