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Katerina kon/shutterstock Despite the extensive journey, including to many developing countries (I have been to Africa more than 20 times), I managed to go through most of my adventures without becoming seriously ill. But when I recently told my doctor that I was rafting on the Zambezi river in Zimbabwe, he looked alarmed. Apparently, it is loaded with Giardia, a parasite that can make you very sick if you accidentally swallow water that has been contaminated by it. How easy is it to get infected, and how dangerous are they anyway? The answers, it turns out, are complex. Just as there are many different viruses and bacteria that can cause everything from colds to life-threatening infections, there are so many different types of parasites that the level of concern depends on a particular scenario, says Brunilda Nazario, MD, a certified therapist and endocrinologist based in New York. In other words, parasites can be just annoying (such as lice) or downright scary (such as brain-eating amoeba). What they all have in common is that these organisms need a host to survive: the parasite either attaches to you or lives inside you and is fed away from your body, at the expense of your health. You can contract the parasite almost anywhere, but some scenarios seriously increase the risk. Here are four that should be on your radar. (Heal your entire body with a 12-day Rodale liver detox for overall body health.)

**Advertising - Continue reading below you are visiting (or just back from) a developing country.** Parasitic infections are more common in rural or developing areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America, says Nazario. These areas are often home to malaria caused by the parasite, which is transmitted to humans when they get bitten by the mosquitoes that carry it. Of all parasitic infections, malaria causes the highest number of deaths worldwide. Of course, this does not mean that you should avoid travelling to places where malaria has been detected; you just have to be smart. Take antimalarial drugs before, during and after the trip as a preventive measure; use insect repellents with DEET; sleep under a mosquito net or in a room with air conditioning; and wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts at dawn and dusk. If you feel sick on your return, make sure you tell your doctor about your travels so that he can run the appropriate tests.

**MORE: 5 scary diseases that you can get from a mosquito bite** You have a child in kindergarten or elementary school. Parasite pediculosis (head lice) easily spreads among young children: lice can jump from head to head, crawl on the carpet, and live in someone's hat or brush that you just borrowed. And once toddlers bring lice home, it's rare long before adults in house start scratching. While combing nits can be a pain (and gross), head lice are not dangerous, and medicinal shampoo usually does a good job of killing live lice.

**MORE: 8 uses for tea tree oil you have a cat.** Cats can spread parasite toxoplasmosis, especially outdoor cats, which can gnaw at small rodents or birds. Cats pass the parasite through their faeces and you can get infected when you change the kitten litter. Toxoplasmosis is not always dangerous - many people have it and do not know it, but if your immune system is not in the foot, problems may arise. Ditto if you are pregnant: you can transmit toxoplasmosis to your fetus, and in rare cases it can damage your baby's eyes and brain. The best way to avoid toxoplasmosis is to wash your hands after changing the litter before doing anything else (especially touching your face!). If you are pregnant, relegating the trash to your partner's changing responsibilities and keeping your cat indoors (so that he doesn't eat infected birds and rodents in the first place) is also a smart move. You consume contaminated food or water. No one (hopefully) intentionally drinks water that has been contaminated with untreated sewage, eat fruits and vegetables that have been washed in it, or cook the fish that has floated in it. While traveling, it pays to take note of any special warnings aimed at tourists, such as not drinking tap water. If you get sick in any way, do you know that? Can. If you accidentally eat food contaminated with bacteria, you'll probably end up with a GI disaster (think vomiting and diarrhea) that comes on pretty dramatically. But parasitic intestinal infections tend to be insidious - symptoms come slowly and gradually - plus, they may or may not include your digestive system, says Nazario. Possible skin lesions, confusion and other problems; it just depends on the type of parasite. Of course, anytime you notice strange symptoms, no matter what they are (or where you are), it makes sense to talk to your doctor. If your doctor suspects that you have a parasite, he may have to do a little digging to sort it out. Diagnosis requires samples of various bodily fluids such as blood, stool and urine. For example, if the parasite lives in the gastrointestinal tract, eggs or cysts can be seen in a stool sample under a microscope, says Nazario. But sometimes a tissue biopsy is required from the lungs, skin or intestines. Although most parasites can be treated with medication, prevention is always the best medicine. Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, change the diaper, care for someone who is sick, before eating, after collecting animal waste, and obviously when cooking, says Nazario. Avoid from lakes and streams and swallowing water in pools or water water And travelers to areas that have parasites in food and water should boil, cook or clean whatever they ingest. This content is created and supported by a third party and is imported to this page to help users provide their email addresses. You may be able to find more information about this and similar content on piano.io

**Advertising - Continue reading below the example of parasites in desert fleas living on a coyote.** The flea drinks blood from the coyote, which brings nutritional benefits. However, the coyote does not benefit; instead, he loses vital blood and experiences pain from the process. In addition, the coyote may develop diseases. Parasitic relationships are associated with two organisms, but only one benefit. By taking the necessary nutrients out of the body, the parasite benefits itself over time, but the host organism suffers as a result, often losing the necessary nutrients and other substances for the parasite. The mistletoe desert is a plant that grows on desert willows. Mistletoe attaches to the willow and takes the nutrients it needs from the willow. It does not harm the willow, as long as the willow takes in enough water and nutrients for itself and the desert mistletoe. However, if environmental conditions change and willow no longer receives the nutrients that both organisms must survive, mistletoe takes nutrients before the willow can process them for itself. As a result, the willow eventually dies if the environment does not change, while the mistletoe thrives until the willow is dead and can no longer support mistletoe. Parasites can cause serious health problems in birds, just as they can affect other animals and humans. More than just worms or ticks, parasites can come in many forms. It is important for bird owners to become familiar with the most common parasites that infect poultry and the symptoms they cause. Knowing what signs of illness to look for can help you make sure that your pet gets prompt veterinary attention. Here is a list of some of the most common parasites that infect poultry and how to recognize them. This parasitic fungus affects the bird's respiratory system. Caused by the aspergillus fungus (and often reduced to asper), this infection is very common in domestic parrots as well as mallards and other ducks in the wild. Captive hawks and falcons are also susceptible to aspergillosis, especially when they are kept in unsanitary conditions. This fungus is found mainly on decomposing substances such as garbage or compost heap, or in a dirty cage. A bird with aspergillosis will show symptoms that resemble human flu, including shortness of breath, abnormal or unusual litter (including diarrhea), nasal discharge, crunchy eye, and weight loss. Treatment of aspergillosis with antibiotics can be successful if it is caught early. For The For bird with a chronic case of this infection, the prognosis is not very good. To prevent aspergillosis, keep your bird's cage clean, wash all fruits and vegetables before feeding them the bird, and wash your hands before and after handling your bird. This parasite attacks the gastrointestinal tract of poultry, and, like aspergillosis, can be transmitted when a bird eats contaminated food. Symptoms of Giardia in birds, as in humans, include severe diarrhea, weight loss and dehydration. Birds infected with Giardia can also display pen plucking and other signs of itching and may become more vocal. Giardia is most common among bird families of parrots, including budgies, cockatoos, cacatiels, macaws, and parrots. It is a zoonous disease, meaning an infected bird can transmit infection with a human, so be careful when handling your pet. Frequent hand washing is one of the surest ways to prevent Giardia transmission. Although rarer than other parasites, Sarcocystis is the bird owner's worst nightmare. These parasites can cause a deadly infection that has several different varieties. One affects the neurological system of the bird, one causes muscle diseases, and the third affects the lungs of birds and the pulmonary system. Symptoms of sarcocystis include lethargy, shortness of breath, yellow droppings, tail bouncing, and in extreme cases, the bird may suddenly die. Like Giardia, Sarcocystis is also a zoonous. Scaly Face Mites can wreak havoc on the bird's skin and plumage. This parasitic condition disproportionately affects the kidneys, but can infect canary and finches as well. As the name suggests, this infection is displayed as white, scaly on the growth of the bird's beak, mouth, nostrils and eyes. There is also a version of the infection that can cause scaly growth on the bird's feet. Birds will lose feathers, and their legs and beaks can appear deformed, sometimes even after treatment. Catching this disease early is crucial to reducing the risk of bird permanently scarring. He is treated by a bird veterinarian with anti-parasitic drugs, either with injections or oral. The key to keeping your bird free of a parasitic infection is to make sure he has a nutritious diet, so that if he gets sick, his immune system can work to fight the infection. Make sure his living room is kept clean and without any mold or other forks. Washing your hands often when communicating with a bird is important as well. Ok.

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