Medical Benefits of Tapeworms

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 Typically considered an unwanted companion at best, at worst, a potentially deadly parasitic infection, tapeworms are not commonly associated with in the connotative lexicon of ‘health benefits’. Common symptoms of a tapeworm infection include: nausea, generalized weakness, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, diarrhea, weight loss, and a host of other complications resultant of nutritional deficiencies. In invasive infections, more severe cases include fever, associated bacterial infections, cystic masses or lumps, and even neurological symptoms.

 Antithetical to the pejorative association of tapeworms, science is establishing an entirely novel field of positive medical applications for these parasites. In a natural setting, researchers have discovered that tapeworms may provide a positive benefit to the hosts that they infect: “After dissecting 16 whitecheek sharks found in the Persian Gulf and removing tapeworms that they found, the team compared the concentrations of different compounds found inside the tissues of the sharks and the worms. They discovered that the worms had an astonishing 278 to 455 times higher levels of the toxic metals cadmium and lead inside their little bodies than the sharks did” (Scienceinschool.org, Healthy Horrors). Beyond this, it has been suggested that it assisted in a ‘rebooting’ of monkey’s intestinal tracts following an infection. This was done through a spike of immune system activity subsequent to the cleansing of a tapeworm infection. Furthermore, it appeared to assist in altering the bacterial composition within the monkey’s entire digestive intestinal tract.

 In pharmaceutical applications, there are already clinical trials underway for humans who are suffering from multiple digestive and autoimmune diseases. This may assist people who suffer from multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s disease, autism, or other similar ailments that may have been caused by malfunctions in the immune system (wired.com).

 While potential downside risks are prevalent, there is precedent to using various diseases, in precise and calculated manners, in order to yield sufficient positive results. Resultant of this, there may be a positive health benefit by infecting one’s self with a dangerous parasite.

Works cited:

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* "The Potential Health Benefits of Parasitic Gut Worms." *Wired.com*. Conde Nast Digital, 18 Nov. 0012. Web. 01 July 2013. <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2012/11/whipworm-immune-regulation/>.