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Nutritional aspects of infection

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Abstract

Current knowledge is examined about the means whereby ascariasis, hookworm disease, strongyloidiasis and trichuriasis may contribute to the aetiology of human malnutrition. Results from experiments with related parasites in the laboratory have demonstrated the role of gastrointestinal

helminthiases in animal malnutrition. Some evidence shows that in children, infection with the intestinal stages of *Ascaris lumbricoides* is associated with reduced growth rate, disturbed nitrogen balance, malabsorption of vitamin A, abnormal fat digestion, lactose maldigestion and an increased intestinal transit time. The main impact of hookworm infection is its relationship with iron-deficiency anaemia which may have effects at the community level as regards work and productivity in adults and learning and school performance in children. More research is needed to extend knowledge of the nutritional impact of ascariasis and hookworm disease in order to establish their public health significance. Research is needed also to identify the range of nutritional effects on man that occur as a result of trichuriasis and strongyloidiasis. The significance of less prevalent and more localized gastrointestinal helminthiases should not be ignored.

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