

Unusual Diarrhea Caused by Bad Salad

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David is a 58-year-old gentleman, a very successful local business man and a marathon runner. He is very healthy and comes to clinic usually just for annual physicals and renewal of allergic pills. He made an appointment with me for severe fatigue. He has stopped running for several months and did not feel right. When he came to my clinic, I noticed that he really looked tired. But to my surprise, he did not gain any weight and actually lost several pounds. It did not make much sense to me. I further asked him why he did not gain any weight without running for several months. He said he was wondering about that too.

He told me that he sometimes had good appetite but other times no appetite. He had good 2-3 weeks and then followed by 2-3 bad weeks. During bad weeks, he feels very fatigued, possible some low-grade fever, no appetite with nausea, some belly cramps and diarrhea. After those bad weeks, he will have 2-3 relatively good weeks though still feel tired. He said that all those symptoms started one week after he attended a national meeting about three months ago. He suspected that some bad salad might have caused his symptoms. There are about one third of the meeting attendees reportedly having similar symptoms and local public health department is still investigating the case. He went to urgent care several times and tried several antibiotic like Ciprofloxacin and Augmentin without much help. I suspected some type of food-borne parasite infection and most likely is Cyclosporiasis infection. I ordered special stool test for it. The report came back and showed Cyclospora Cayetanensis. Meanwhile, the public health department also sent him the report, stating that Cyclospora Cayetanensis was found in the Basil-Pesto Pasta salad. He received one week treatment of nitazoxanide and his symptoms completely resolved. Since then, I have successfully treated two more cases of Cyclospora Cayetanensis GI infection due to eating bad salad.

Cyclospora Cayetanensis infection is endemic in South America, about 20-50% of the population has the infection and most of them have minimal clinical symptoms. It was mainly reported as traveler's diarrhea. There are several reports of outbreak of cyclosporiasis in the United States since 90's because of eating fresh vegetables or fruits imported from South America. This parasite is very sticky to the food and is very difficult to wash them off. The parasite also can survive a very tough environment. If you have similar symptoms after eating salad, you should discuss with your physician about the possibility of Cyclospora Cayetanensis infection and get treated. If you have any questions about diarrhea and Cyclospora Cayetanensis infection, please contact Dr. Jeff Ye, North Atlanta Medical & Digestive Care at 770-346-0900. We can help!