

Toxoplasma parasite may be acquired from eating undercooked meat

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Credit: Pixabay

A new study by Flinders researchers highlights the possibility of catching Toxoplasma infection from eating undercooked meat.

Toxoplasma is a parasite that causes inflammation of the retina, which is the nerve layer of the eye. Anyone may develop retinal inflammation after an infection with Toxoplasma, but it is more common and more severe in babies, [older adults](#) and people with diseases that affect the immune system.

A study published in the Australian New Zealand *Journal of Public Health* shows that Australian meat is commonly contaminated with Toxoplasma.

Flinders researchers tested lamb mince meat bought from the supermarket three times a week for six months for Toxoplasma. They used a DNA detection test to pick up Toxoplasma in more than one-third of purchases.

There are no vaccines that protect against Toxoplasma, and antibiotic drugs cannot get rid of the parasite, so once a person catches Toxoplasma, they carry it for life.

Flinders Strategic Research Professor and Superstar of STEM, Justine Smith, who led the research, says these findings were new for Australia, but were expected from work done in other parts of the world.

Professor Smith explains that Toxoplasma in meat can be killed easily by cooking the meat to an [internal temperature](#) of 66 °C (or medium) or by freezing it prior to cooking.

It's well known that Toxoplasma can be caught from cats. This is the reason for washing your hands well after clearing the cat litter box.

Another way of catching Toxoplasma is eating raw or undercooked meat. Research from other parts of the world has indicated that meat is commonly contaminated with Toxoplasma, but the issue has received

little attention in Australia.

The meat was also tested for bacteria that cause [food poisoning](#), and these were not detected, showing the meat was well prepared by the vendors. Toxoplasma gets into [meat](#) when livestock are grazing in pastures that cats have frequented.

The Flinders research team now plans to test other meats for Toxoplasma, especially other red meats that are often eaten rare, such as kangaroo and beef. This information will be helpful for public health education around food safety.

More information: Abby C. Dawson et al. Lamb as a potential source of Toxoplasma gondii infection for Australians, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.12955](#)

Provided by Flinders University

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