



Neuroparasitology and Tropical Neurology: Chapter 2. Mechanisms of CNS invasion and damage by parasites (Handbook of Clinical Neurology)

Krister Kristensson, Willias Masocha, Marina Bentivoglio

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Invasion of the central nervous system (CNS) is a most devastating complication of a parasitic infection. Several physical and immunological barriers provide obstacles to such an invasion. In this broad overview focus is given to the physical barriers to neuroinvasion of parasites provided at the portal of entry of the parasites, i.e., the skin and epithelial cells of the gastrointestinal tract, and between the blood and the brain parenchyma, i.e., the blood–brain barrier (BBB). A description is given on how human pathogenic parasites can reach the CNS via the bloodstream either as free-living or extracellular parasites, by embolization of eggs, or within red or white blood cells when adapted to intracellular life. Molecular mechanisms are discussed by which parasites can interact with or pass across the BBB. The possible targeting of the circumventricular organs by parasites, as well as the parasites' direct entry to the brain from the nasal cavity through the olfactory nerve pathway, is also highlighted. Finally, examples are given which illustrate different mechanisms by which parasites can cause dysfunction or damage in the CNS related to toxic effects of parasite-derived molecules or to immune responses to the infection.

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