



What is Ross River Fever?

Ross River Fever (along with Barmah Forest Virus and others) is a mosquito-borne viral disease (arbovirus). It is more common in tropical and warm rural areas or anywhere where infected mosquitos breed. It can become more common after severe flooding. The disease actually resides in some native and other mammals (called vectors), which infect the mosquito when it bites, and the mosquito then passes the disease on to humans in its saliva when it bites. The virus replicates inside cells, then spreads when a critical mass of infection is present and that's when you know you've got it! In Australia Ross River Fever is a notifiable disease.

What are the symptoms?

There are a few lucky people who get the infection, but don't get symptoms. However, most people will get a fever, rash and flu-like symptoms - aching and swelling in the joints, chills, nausea and extreme tiredness etc. It starts about 7-9 days after being bitten. But it's the aftermath that's worse, as most people end up with fatigue not unlike Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, with plenty of arthritis-like symptoms.



How long does this go on?

That varies. An unlucky 10-15% go on to have really chronic symptoms, but others may have the whole thing clear up in 6-12 weeks.

How do you know you've got it?

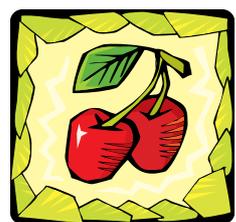
A blood test can find specific antibodies in the blood which will confirm the diagnosis from symptoms. You may need two blood tests, the second a week later.

Where would the joint pain be?

All joints - fingers, toes, ankles, wrists, back, knees and elbows. This happens in about 95% of cases, and in about 90% of cases you also get myalgia, which is aching muscles. Headaches are common. If you've had clinical depression before onset of Ross River Fever, this can make it much worse.

What's the rash look like?

Flattish, red and a bit bumpy. It's called "maculopapular". About 50% of people infected will get the rash.



Can it be prevented?

To some degree, by following all mosquito eradication procedures such as making sure that there is no standing water around the house or yard, wearing protective clothing, and using insect repellent. Use a mosquito net over your bed, and stay indoors at night when mosquitos are most common. However, after major floods, it is almost impossible to prevent when the weather warms up.

What can the doctor do?

Apart from taking a blood sample, not a lot. Most doctors will give anti-inflammatories to relieve the arthritic symptoms and analgesics to relieve pain. They should not give antibiotics unless there is a clear sign of bacterial infection as well.

Ross River Fever and the like are viruses, so taking antibiotics is a waste of time. The problem is that if it is misdiagnosed, the rash may confuse the doctor into thinking it is a bacterial infection. With a fever and rash, Ross River Fever can sometimes be confused with rubella. Ask for the blood test, as taking antibiotics unnecessarily is not sensible.



Why is it called Ross River Fever?

Because it's named after a river in North Queensland, Australia where the virus was first identified.



Is there a vaccine for Ross River Fever?

No. However, once you've had Ross River Fever and recovered, you should never get it again.

What can you do as a natural therapist?

Well, quite a bit actually. We use herbs and nutrients which have shown an antiviral effect in tests. Things like Zinc, Vitamin C, Lysine, and antimicrobial herbs such as garlic, thyme and many others.

For the inflammation, we'd avoid NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories) like ibuprofen and paracetamol, and instead we'd look at fish oils and other dietary changes to reduce the swelling and pain. NSAIDS can cause gut dysfunction and indigestion long-term, so while they may relieve pain, they don't contribute to overall health.

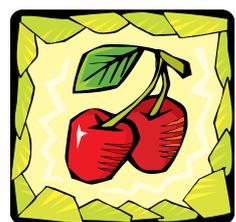
Some people become hypersensitive to all sorts of things they used to be able to tolerate, so we'd look at supporting the liver. When there are allergies present, often the gut and the liver need support. Slippery elm is very healing to the gut, and there are several very good liver support herbs. St Mary's Thistle is one of them.



We can use mineral therapy for all sorts of things, and the great thing is that it doesn't cost too much. We prescribe for symptoms, not named diseases. It's a bit like drop-feeding minerals into the system so the take-up is really efficient. This can be very effective. Blackmores have a professional range called Celloids, which have a higher dosage than the tissue salts which you can buy over the counter.

Vitamin A or Betacarotene is really important to help boost the immune system which is another of our strategies. The vitamin C and zinc will help there too. A strong immune system will help fight the virus and any other bugs taking advantage of your weakened system.

We'd certainly want to use vitamin B to address the fatigue. Energy is made in the body through a complex process called the Krebs Cycle (or Citric Acid Cycle). You need carbs, protein and fats, plus B vitamins, magnesium, zinc, manganese, water and a few other things, and in each cell there's a cyclic process which helps to build energy. Our job is to make sure you get all those required nutrients into your body, and try to also make sure that you absorb them so that this process is made efficient.



Green stuff is great. It has lots of phytonutrients to help prevent inflammation and damage, and it does have all the things to make energy as well as plenty of fibre. Think green leafy veg, spirulina, barley grass, wheat grass juice, chlorella and all those really dark green things. If you don't like the taste, squeeze an orange and have your greens with that, or get tablets.

Get professional treatment, and tell your doctor if you are taking herbal medicines.

A friend of mine had Ross River and it really depressed her. What can you do?

I can use various therapies, such as Bach Flower remedies, counselling, rebirthing, Reiki or even light massage, to help the emotional state. If you're used to being well, getting sick is a real horror story, and many people don't cope well.



Have you treated people with these viruses?

Yes, and I've had good results over time. As a naturopath, I treat the whole person. Most people who get Ross River Fever have other health issues as well, and sometimes haven't realised this. Firstly, any naturopath takes a thorough case history, and I give my client a written report/treatment plan on the second visit. Every person/case is different, and so is every treatment regime.