

7 years ago

#Science in Photos

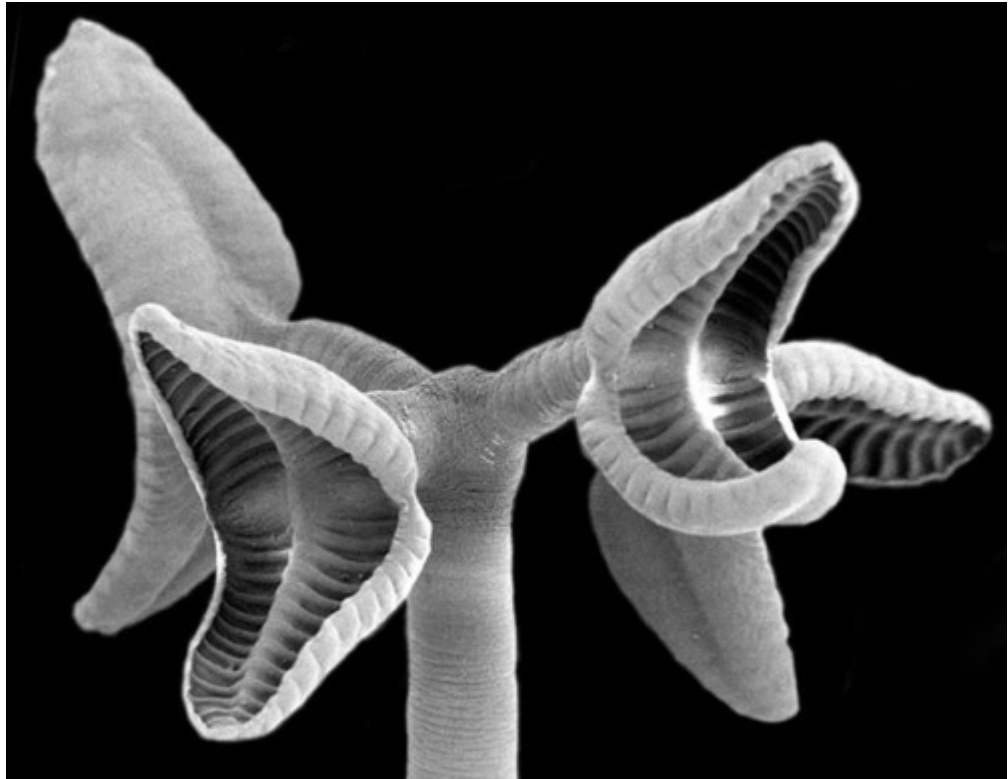
#tapeworms

#today in gross

#dieting

#history

#victorians



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## Worm Slim

The “[paleo diet](#)” is really a modern invention that only roughly resembles what early humans ate. The notion of dieting, though, has a long history. It goes back at least as far as [Victorian England](#), where visions of beautifying body modification sometimes took a horrifying turn.

Example: the tapeworm diet. The idea was that you swallowed a tapeworm egg, then waited for the hatched parasite to settle inside your gut and begin consuming part of whatever you consumed. The idea, as [Atlas Obscura](#) wryly notes, was that a dieter could lose weight while not having to count calories.

Unfortunately, once sufficient weight was shed, there was the problem of getting rid of the parasitical worm. In Victorian days, this involved ingesting special pills or employing inventions like a food-containing cylinder inserted into the digestive tract. The idea was that the tapeworm would be lured and trapped inside the cylinder, which would then be extracted. Unfortunately, many patients choked to death before the tapeworm was successfully removed.

Tapeworms as diet aid are no longer popular, though there are occasional reports of people trying the method. [It never goes well](#). Nobody in their right mind would want something like the organism above hunkered down in their gut unless they were auditioning for a horror film.

The image above is a scanning electron micrograph of the scolex of *Rhinebothrium sp.*, a tapeworm in the new order Rhinebothriidea. The scolex is the part of the worm that latches on to the side of the intestinal wall of the host. Image courtesy of Claire J. Healy

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