

Tropical Sprue is a rare digestive disease in which the small intestine's ability to absorb nutrients is impaired (malabsorption). Consequently, nutritional deficiencies and abnormalities in the mucous lining of the small intestine may be present. The exact cause of this disorder is not known, however it may be related to environmental and nutritional conditions in the tropical regions where it is most prevalent. The exact cause of Tropical Sprue is not known. It is an acquired disorder that may be related to environmental and nutritional factors, or Tropical Sprue may be related to an infectious organism (either viral or bacterial), dietary toxin, parasitic infestation, or a nutritional deficiency such as folic acid. Tropical Sprue causes damage to the mucosal lining of the intestine resulting in the impaired absorption of food, minerals, and water. Tropical Sprue is a rare disorder in temperate regions. It occurs mainly in the tropical regions of the Caribbean, India, South Africa, and Southeast Asia. Transients, tourists and visitors to these areas can be affected. Treatment for Tropical Sprue includes the use of folic acid, cobalamin, and antibiotics such as tetracycline, oxytetracycline, or ampicillin. The dosage of these medications depends on the severity of the disorder as well as how the patient responds to the therapy. Combined therapy with folic acid and tetracycline seems to rapidly reduce the severity of the symptoms and also heal unhealthy tissue in the small intestine. Other nutrients may be given as needed (i.e., iron, vitamin B12). Diarrhea associated with this disorder may be controlled with anti-diarrhea agents.