

## QAR PRACTICE: THE VAMPIRE LEGEND

Science says there's no such thing as vampires – doesn't it? Come with us as we take a look behind the legend. The facts may be scarier than you think.

"From ghoulies and ghosties and long leggety beasties, and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord deliver us!" begs an old Scottish prayer. Fear can have a powerful grip on the mind, but there is evidence to suggest that legends of ghouls and monsters may be based in boring old reality.

Consider this description from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: *"His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth was cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth."*

The bloodthirsty Count's features could have been caused, say some researchers, by a disorder called porphyria cutanea tarda (PCT). This "Vampire Disease" is a set of rare blood disorders. Before doctors understood the scientific basis of PCT, the disorder caused the suffering of many patients when they needed love and care most. The good news is, it is not contagious. Unfortunately, it is also not curable.

People suffering from porphyria have some of the symptoms shown by mythological vampires. Their skin is sensitive to sunlight, their urine is red to purple in color, their gums often shrink making the teeth look more prominent and canine-like, and they have an adverse reaction to garlic. In medieval Europe, people began to refer to patients with porphyria as "vampires." However, they are far from what we now see on TV or the movies. They are not dangerous, in fact they are sick. The symptoms listed below helped create the modern vampire legend that we now know:

- 1) **Sensitivity to sunlight** – When a porphyria sufferer is exposed to the rays of the sun, his skin and face get disfigured and blackened. It also ruptures and swells and the resulting sores have thick hair growing from it.
- 2) **Fangs** – The fangs that vampires have are actually the appearance that a PCT patient gets when his gums begin to recede. This results in the exposed, fang-like teeth that may be considered gruesome and frightening in appearance.
- 3) **Drinking of blood** – Since PCT patients have purple-colored urine, it was widely believed that this was because they drank blood. During medieval times, patients may have been prescribed animal blood to drink as a means to treat their blood disorder.
- 4) **Sensitivity to garlic** – PCT patients has aversion to garlic since the chemicals in it aggravate their symptoms. They can experience agonizing pain because of garlic.
- 5) **Aggressiveness** – PCT has been linked to mental illness, irritability, and aggression. This may be the reason vampires are taken to be dangerous.

Today, PCT has mutated into multiple sets of disorders. It is not common, but may exist in 1 out of 10,000 people. Many tests must be done to diagnose it. It is not curable, but may be contained through regular blood transfusion and healthy lifestyle.

### QUESTIONS

1) Is there a cure for PCT?

QAR Type \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

---

2) Describe at least three symptoms of PCT.

QAR Type \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

---

3) What is the purpose of the quotation from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*?

QAR Type \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

---

4) Can you think of other medical conditions that were feared because they were misunderstood?

QAR Type \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Now it's your turn to create questions based on today's reading. Write at least one question for each QAR category, and then write its answer.**

In the Book - Right There: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

In the Book - Think and Search: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

In My Head - On My Own: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

In My Head - Author and Me: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_