

Virulence factors in fungal pathogens of man.

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Abstract

Human fungal pathogens are a commonly underestimated cause of severe diseases associated with high morbidity and mortality. Like other pathogens, their survival and growth in the host, as well as subsequent host damage, is thought to be mediated by virulence factors which set them apart from harmless microbes. In this review, we describe and discuss commonly employed strategies for fungal survival and growth in the host and how these affect the host–fungus interactions to lead to disease. While many of these strategies require host-specific virulence factors, more generally any fitness factor which allows growth under host-like conditions can be required for pathogenesis.

Furthermore, we briefly summarize how different fungal pathogens are thought to damage the host. We find that in addition to a core of common activities relevant for growth, different groups of fungi employ different strategies which in spite of (or together with) the host's response can lead to disease.

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