

# What Is Polio?

Elinor Young journeyed to the mountains of Papua, Indonesia, as the survivor of a terrible disease called polio. Polio is one of many diseases caused by viruses that attack the nerves and can paralyze a person's muscles.

A polio attack begins by feeling like a bad flu. After a week or two, 999 out of every 1000 people get well. But for that 1 out of 1,000, the person's muscles will begin to feel weak. Then he'll become paralyzed. Most people recover completely from this paralysis over the course of the next several months. Sometimes a person never fully recovers the use of some of his muscles. (In Elinor's case, though her legs were always weak, her muscle strength improved enough to walk short distances.)

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Elinor was struck with polio, there were more cases of polio than any time in the history of the United States. Some scientific evidence indicates that this was at least partly because Americans were eating far more sugar than they ever had before, and this made their bodies weaker and more susceptible to diseases. Just in North Carolina, almost 2,500 cases of polio were reported in 1948. But when a doctor went on the radio and urged the people of North Carolina to stop eating so much sugar because of its connection with polio, the next year the people of North Carolina decreased their sugar by 90%! They found that year that polio cases also decreased by 90%.

A polio vaccine was first given in the 1950s, two years after Elinor was struck with the disease. Now almost no cases of polio are reported in the U.S., but other paralyzing diseases still linger, and around the world the cases of paralysis caused by viruses still number in the tens of thousands.

Elinor Young and others remind us that a paralyzing disease doesn't have to prevent our joyful service for the Lord.



Elinor contracted polio when she was just five years old.

**People do research to find answers to questions. Name one question you have about this article that you might be able to find an answer to by researching.**

---

---