The 18 Solutions I Wish I Had Back When I Started…

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Short and Painless Introduction

In this eBook you will find 18 problems that aquarium owners commonly encounter and a possible solution to each problem. I personally have run into all of these problems. Sometimes I had someone to ask for help, but usually I had to do a lot of research to discover the proper solution.

Some of these problems have more than one solution, but there is only one "best solution". Just like in school when you answered a test question correctly and didn't get full marks because the teacher was looking for a "better" right answer; same ridiculous idea applies here. Only now we are dealing with the lives of our fish and that provides much more motivation to get things right I think.

Anyhow, you may not have an encountered any of the following problems. In which case you will get a collective "screw you" (just joking =P) from all of us aquarists who have been hit over the head with many of these problems. I'm sorry to say that one day you will probably encounter some of these problems. At least by reading this you will become aware of the problems and know immediately what to do when they creep up on you.

In an attempt to make this eBook less abstract and more interesting to read I have written the problems and solution in a question and answer format and associated each with a real life example; hopefully it works.

So, without further ado, here's to problems and the character they build!

With warmest regards,

Bjorn Allpas

P.S. This report has been proof read quite a few times. Yet every time little things get changed and a type slips through the net. If you find a spelling mistake or grammatical error, please do write in and let me know. I would really appreciate it.

The Driftwood Covered in Milky White Substance Dilemma

I bought a new piece of driftwood last weekend and boiled it for several hours until it stopped dyeing the water that dark brown color we all love. Well, 3 days after I have put it in my tank, I awoke this morning to find it was covered in a white milky, gooey-looking substance. I have no idea what this is, I haven't lost any fish and my tank parameters are still normal:

Parameter	Value
pH	6.8
Ammonia/Nitrites	None
Nitrates	Minimal
Water Hardness	Soft
Alkalinity	Low
Temperature	78F (25.5C)

Should I take the driftwood out?

I Don't Like the Look of that fungus one bit!

Mollies - Natural Born fungus eaters! ...usually...

Solution – Like the Beatles said, "Let It Be"

What you are seeing is a fungus. Usually, the fungus will not live through boiling it for several hours, but some fungus is tough as nails. The fungus will go away on its own within about a month (once whatever it is feeding on in the driftwood is used up), but if you don't want to look at the milky white you can take the driftwood out and scrub it clean. There is no need to boil it again, but you can if it makes you feel better. Just so you know, some fish even like to eat the fungus; like Mollies for example.

How Often Should I/Can I Change Water?

I'm not sure what is appropriate for water changes. How much should I change and how often? I'd like basically to know the minimum, but also the maximum before you may be doing damage to the fish or the cycle. I like changing the water!

Solution – Water Is Good For All Living Livings Things

You cannot really go wrong with water changes as long as you do your best to match the parameters (parameters being things like ammonia, nitrites, nitrates, temperature, pH, etc.) of the new water with the water currently in the tank. That being said, it's not realistic to try to match ammonia, nitrite, nitrate levels before you add new water. So the most important parameters you are looking out for are temperature and pH. You should dechlorinate the water with a dechlorination product (more on these later) if there is a lot of chlorine or chloramines in your water. Many people use straight tap water to change the water in their tank, but the people who do this have tested their tap water before hand to find out what its parameters are. If your tap water parameters are close to your tank parameters you should be able to use it to change the water. The added bonus of using tap water is that can easily adjust the temperature to match your aquarium water temperature.

If all the parameters are about equal you can theoretically change as much water as you want as often as you like, but you might have better things to do. So, I would recommend changing 50% of your water every 7 to 10 days. This is assuming that your tank is healthy (ie. None of the fish are sick, the water is clear, there is no algae, etc.). If you are fighting an algae or disease problem then you should change the water more frequently; even every other day in severe cases.

Test Strips for Testing Water Parameters – I Thought It Was A Good Idea At The Time…

Have you found the _____ to be reliable?

(Insert name of favorite test strip here)

I was hoping there's a dependable, easy multi test strip (these or something you could recommend)...

Solution – Let Me Tell You Something

Test strips are Garbage with a capital G. I'm pretty adamant about this because the big companies are basically duping new aquarists with inferior products that don't do what they're supposed to. The theory of test strips is great, but test strips fall short in practice. One of the problems is that if they are exposed to any kind of moisture or humidity, during transport or storage, your results will be incorrect. Unfortunately, incorrect testing can lead to unhappy/unhealthy/dying/dead fish. The strips that you paste on the walls of your aquarium are not much better. Using the liquid test kits is the only way to go. It's more work (but so is anything worth while right?), but they are very accurate. There are many different kinds of liquid test kits on the market and many are reasonably priced (API Pro Liquid Test Kit, Tetra 30 Liquid Test Kit, Red Sea Nitrate Mini-Lab Test Kit). When you are first starting your aquarium you will want to test once every day. Once your aquarium is well established you don't really have to test unless you see problems, or change something, or do a water change. If you do decide to go with liquid test kits make sure you shake the heck out of them before you test.

Also, changing your water regularly is best way to keep your tank healthy, make sure you do it!

I Am Starting A Second Tank, Is There Any Way To Speed Up The Cycle?

I am setting up a 10g that I just got from a friend. I am cleaning my 30g today including a water change. Can I use some of the water from the 30g to speed up the cycle in the 10g? The last time I did a fishless cycle it took 5.5 weeks. How can I get it going faster this time?

Solution – Seeded Media To The Rescue!

Using water from the 30g tank will do nothing for your cycle because there are not many bacteria floating around in the water. All you have to do is take seeded media from the 30g tank and put it into the 10g tank. FYI: "seeded media" means anything that would have bacteria on it. The best thing to do is take part of the sponge in your 30g filter and put it into the filter for the 10g. Or you could even cut off some of the cartridges and put it into the filter of the 10g. Putting the seeded media directly into the filter is more direct than swishing seeded media around in the water in the hope that you will transfer enough bacteria. There are a lot of resources online regarding Nitrogen Cycles; there is no reason to reinvent the wheel.

Algae Is Not Cool

Is this normal? Overnight my brown algae turned to a light green.

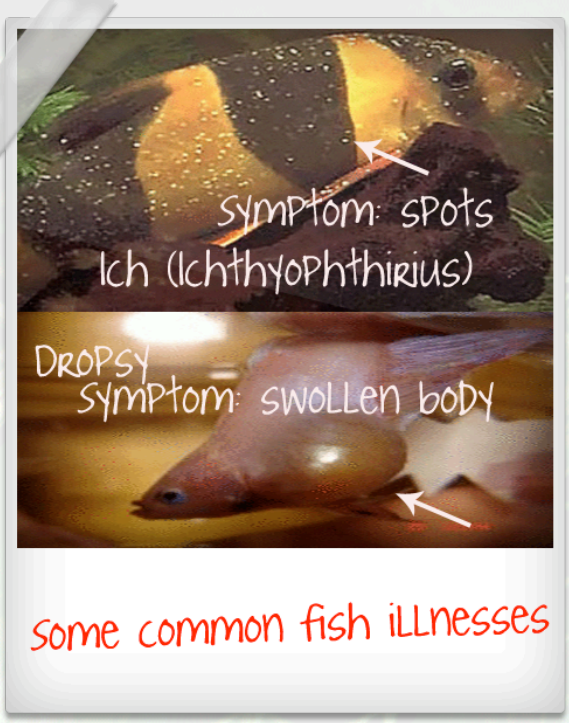
Solution – Brown Algae May Go Away On Its Own, Green Will Not

Having all of the brown algae disappear and be replaced by green algae doesn't often happen overnight, but sometimes it does. You're going to have to take action because green algae is there to stay unless you do something about it. There are couple things you can do listed in order of most difficult to least difficult (least difficult is my favorite). You can siphon it off, you can scrape it off and hope the filter catches it, or you can get yourself an algae eater (for example Plecos - *Hypostomus punctatusare*). Once you have the algae removed you might want to think about doing some large (50-60%) water changes multiple times over the next few weeks and perhaps reduce the amount of food you give your fish. The food that the fish don't eat and falls to the bottom can help algae grow.

Another common generator of algae is direct sunlight entering the tank. Direct sunlight will also make it difficult for you to keep the water temperature constant which will stress your fish.

Can I Mix Sick Fish With Healthy Fish?

I have a fish with black spot disease. He is in my 30g and I would like to put my breeding pair of convicts in there because they are in a tiny tank. Anyway, is it a good idea to put the convicts in there?



Solution – Absolutely Not!

Sometimes, as painful as it might be, you have to use common sense. If you know a fish is sick, treat that fish until it is healthy again and then give it some companions. Do not put healthy fish into a tank with a sick fish.

If you do have a fish that is ill here is what you should do.

First, remove the ill fish from the community and put it into a Quarantine Tank (sometimes called Isolation Tanks or Hospital Tanks and it is usually smaller than the main aquarium). There are a couple reasons we do this. Medication for a small 40 gallon Quarantine Tank is much cheaper than medication for your larger tank. Also, the medication used to treat fish may be harmful to some invertebrates present in your main tank.

Once you have the ill fish you can treat it without having to worry about other fish being infected or the medication hurting other organisms. Use the medication specific to your fishes illness as directed and keep a close watch to see if your fish is getting better.

Immediately after removing the ill fish from your main tank you should do a 50% water change and another water change the next day. Some fish illnesses are contagious and may be floating around in your tanks water looking for other fish to infect.

My Fish Dropped Out Of School!

In my 75g tank there are 7 neon tetras and 9 zebra danios along with others. I used to love it when they schooled, but now the danios rarely school and are kind of obnoxious. A couple of them like the bottom, a couple of them like the middle and none of them go to the top except at feeding time. Back when I just had the 9 danios in a 10g they schooled back and forth at the top of the water. The Neons school sometimes, but there are almost always 1-3 off doing their own thing.

I've tested the water to see if the cycle broke somehow; it didn't. Is this a normal behavior response to a lack of a predator? I can't really add a predator because the tank is quite full, but theoretically would having a predator get them to school more?

Solution – It's Okay For Fish (Not Kids) To Drop Out Of School…

It is important to realize why fish school. Fish often school when they are new to a tank or uncomfortable in their environment. So, it sounds to me like your fish are happy in their tank and don't have the need to fight stress by schooling. Sometimes fish go back to schooling when they are startled but even then some of them will be off doing their own thing. I have seen individual tetras that school with other fishes! Those are happy fish. To recap, if your fish drop out of school you're doing all the right things and you're fish are happy.

Populating A Tank Before It's Fully Cycled

I recently started fresh on my 80g community tank after moving. I filled the tank with dechlorinated water and got the filter/heater (79 degrees) running 3 weeks ago. One week ago, I added Tetra Safe Start, 2 guppies and 6 glass cats.

Here are my readings as of last night:

Parameter	Value
Ammonia	0-0.25ppm
Nitrates	4ppm
Nitrites	0.0.25ppm
pH	8 (whoa, gonna fix that today, or is it okay?)

What are your opinions as far as if my tank is cycled? Also, what damage am I doing to the fish with the PH being so high? I will lower the PH this weekend, just not sure if there are long term damages I have done. I assume the guppies are hardier than the glass cats, but the glass cats seem to be doing fine.

Solution – Oh Uh! Not Yet Cycled!

First of all, if your tank is showing any ammonia or nitrite readings then it is not yet fully cycled. When they both reach zero then you have a cycled tank. Once your tank is cycled you can start adding fish, but only a few every 10 days to two weeks. If you add too many at once you run the risk of upsetting the tank's cycle. For now, wait until your tank is cycled.

As for the pH, it can change while the cycle is being established so don't worry much about that just yet. And a pH of 8 is acceptable for most fish, so you're doing okay there. You get props for using Tetra Safestart; Biospira Instant Ocean (this Biospira is for marine aquariums, I wasn't able to find one for freshwater aquariums online) is another alternative if you can get a hold of it. You will find mixed reviews for both, but I've had success using both of them.

Which Water Treatments Are Best?

What kind of water treatments are you using or have used in the past? Dechlorine, safe start, and such…

Solution – My Money Is On This One

I have used many in the past, but now I only use Seachem Prime. It is very concentrated so it goes a long way. It removes chloramine and heavy metals from my water.

Smelly Business

How can you de-smell a filter? Mine is starting to reek pretty dam bad. I did my normal 2x a week 50% change and all, it's just that the filter...SMELLS! Worst part is the tank is in my room and it's not fun to smell : (

Solution – De-Smelling The Smelly Business

I would recommend adding activated filter carbon to your filter for a week or so; the carbon is made to remove smells and medications from the water. If that doesn't work remove your filter and clean it. Keep the bacterial culture in the tank and then remove the filter and clean out whatever is in there. There could be a lot of built up junk in the filter which may be causing the smell. Be careful when doing this however. Cleaning your filter may cause a mini-cycle which can then throw off your tank.

Will Meds For My Fish Kill The Good Bacteria In My Aquarium?

I was wondering if pimafix and melafix kills the beneficial bacteria in my filters? I have been treating fungus on some of my fish and I hope that the meds won't kill the good bacteria and cause my tank to go downhill.

Solution – When In Doubt, Use As Directed

If you use the meds as directed you should not have huge problems. After treating my tanks they usually go through a mini-cycle, which is a cost of having sick fish. If you use the meds longer than directed then you could in fact kill the beneficial bacteria in your tank and then your tank will have to go through a full cycle.

Medication can be created to specifically target certain microorganisms and not others, but that requires a lot of research and development by the pharmaceutical companies. The cost of which is then passed on to us, the consumers. And, these companies only spend the time and money researching and developing if they think they can make their investment back a 100 fold. That being said, they don't feel that the aquarium market is big enough and so most fish medications are not completely selective and will kill all bacteria if used as directed.

Dechlorinating Your Water

I've been using Chloram-x and I'm very happy with it. Unfortunately, the store I used to buy it from when out of business and now I have to find something else. Is there something you can recommend?

There Are A Couple Good Products

First of all let me say, you can find almost anything online, including Chloram-x, so you don't have find something else. You can order it online from companies like Amazon. Here are some other options for you. SeaChem Prime is one of the best, if not the best out there. Like I said earlier, it's very concentrated so a little goes a long way. API Dechlorinator is another one that is very popular among aquarists.

Hard Water Problems

We've recently moved to a town with hard water and that is bad for a lot of the fish and plants. A Local Fish Store (LFS) recommended two ways to solve this problem. First, add distilled water and second, get a reverse osmosis machine. That, of course, is expensive and not easy.

However, in one of my aquarium books, the author suggests that an alternative to distilled water is just to boil it and let it cool down. Any experiences with this? Might that do the trick? I already have 2 seasoned logs in my tank so I hesitate to add more. But my pH is constantly going down after only a couple of days.

Solution – Hard Water Solutions

First of all, you can definitely add distilled water or get a reverse osmosis machine, both should work. As for boiling the water, that will make the water harder. Solid minerals, predominantly calcium and magnesium, dissolved in water are what make water hard; the higher the concentration of dissolved minerals the harder the water. When you boil water, the vapor that you see coming out of the pot is pure water, so the minerals are left in the water and their concentration increases. That is in most cases mind you. If you water is REALLY hard then boiling will actually cause the minerals precipitate out of solution leaving you with softer water. The best thing to do is just boil some water. If you see solids forming then you are making the water softer, but if there are no solids forming then you are making the water harder.

Now that the technical stuff is out of the way…

The fish that you buy at the local fish store are acclimatized to the hard the hard water since the store is probably using tap water to fill their tanks. This means that you can relatively comfortable using tap water as well. If you absolutely want to soften the water, API has a great water softener pillow, which you basically just put into your filter and it removed magnesium, calcium and other minerals. It will last for about 48hours and it comes with "recharging" powder as it's called so that you can keep reusing the same pillow. You would probably only recharge after every water change.

Bubble Trouble

I have a 29g freshwater tank and sometimes there are lots of little tiny bubbles floating around the tank. I have 2 HOB filters and an air stone. What is causing the little bubbles and are they harmful to my fish?

Solution – Bursting Your Bubbles

The tiny bubbles that cloud your aquarium can be caused by two things; first, a large water change using tap water or too much aeration. Large water changes using tap water can cause micro-bubbles because gasses dissolved in the water will leave the water due to the changing environment. It is like a bottle of soda, when the bottle is closed there are no bubbles, but once the bottle is open there is less pressure in the bottle and CO_2 gas will begin exiting the soda.

The second cause, aeration, is usually a result of too many elements introducing air into your tank water. You can try removing the air stone to see if the bubbles are reduced. If your fish start spending more time near the top of the tank to breath then there is not enough air in the water. If that is the case, put the same air stone or a smaller one back in.

You can also turn your filter off for a bit to see if the bubbles go away faster. The bubbles are generally not harmful to your fish. If there is a fast current in your tank then bubbles breezing past your fish could cause them irritation.

Cleaning Your Sand

I have sand as the substrate in my tank and I'm trying to figure out how to keep it clean. What I've been doing is using a turkey baster to blow the debris to one end of the tank where I then use the siphon to suck it up.

Now, having said that, what I'd REALLY love to have is some type of pump that uses tank water (not something that introduces new water into the tank like a python does). Does some such small pump exist so I can gently blow the debris around without blasting everything out of the tank?

Solution – The Easy Way To Clean Sand

The easiest solution is probably to install a small power head just above the level of your sand, which will force the debris to remain floating in the water and then the filter can pick it up. You can turn the power head on low so that it will not disturb the sand too much.

You can in fact use a Python to vacuum the debris from the surface of the sand. If you pay attention you will not lose very much sand and you will have a clean tank in no time.

Something you may want to do is scoop handfuls of sand and turn them. When you are doing this you will see micro-bubbles materialize out of the sand. Those gases can be harmful if the buildup. I recommend that you vacuum the sand once, then gently turn the sand one handful after another, and then vacuum again. Turn in the sand will reveal more debris that was hidden in the sand.

An alternative to all the water hoses and complexity of vacuuming your aquarium you can use a battery powered vacuum which basically sucks debris off the bottom of your aquarium which gets trapped in a filter and the clean aquarium water is returned to your aquarium. At under $5USD it's pretty inexpensive.

More Algae Problems

Can anyone tell me what kind of algae this is and what I should do about it? I am guessing its hair or thread algae, but I am not sure.

Basically, it's brown. It starts out as a single strand or two that grows several inches. Then overnight it blooms into dozens of strands. One even got caught on a fish for a little while. I removed it once during a water change but it came back. Any ideas?

Solution – Stupid Algae

This looks like Black Beard Algae, a type of Hair Algae. It can be tricky to get rid of it and one way to be sure that you keep it is to try to remove it by hand while it's still alive. Removing by hand will cause the spores to spread around the tank making it more difficult to get rid of.

You can try killing it with hydrogen peroxide. You would put it in a syringe or turkey baster and then squirt it directly on the algae (no more than 3ml/g per day).

As a preventative measure a stable CO_2 source is very good and also a product named Excel works quite well. A more naturopathic solution is to have a segmented lighting schedule. Algae requires long periods of light for photosynthesis so you can have your lights come on for 3 hours and the off for 3 hours. Then on for 3 and off for 4, just a semi-random schedule is required. This will slowly kill the algae. Your plants will grow more slowly during this treatment but they will survive and the algae won't. Once the algae are gone you may want to consider adjusting the type of light, its intensity or the lighting period so that you won't get the same algae back.

My pH Is Too Low!

I finally got my tank up and running a few weeks ago but I can't seem to keep the pH level steady at 8.

It's on 7.1 at the moment and I have Malawi's on the way. From what I have read they need a pH between 7.8 - 8.6. I do 15-20% water change every weekend and my tank consists of bogwood and ocean rocks.

Solution – Raising Your pH

You should know that drift wood and bogwood can make your water more acidic (in other words, lower your pH), so may want to get rid of it if you do not want to invest in getting some calcium carbonate. Also, dying salt water life on ocean rocks can lower the pH. If there is any salt water life on your ocean rocks it is only a problem until it is gone and it will go away on its own.

A quick and easy way to increase your pH is to add calcium carbonate (found in corals, sea shells and certain rocks including limestone). You can buy crushed corals and mix them in with your substrate or you can look into getting "Cichlid Substrate" because that comes with crushed shells mixed in. You may also be able to find calcium carbonate crystals in a store that sells rocks. They look really cool and they lower your pH; sounds prefect to me!

You can also add Cichlid salts/buffers to you water after a water change, which will raise your pH levels. Any changes that you make to your pH you will want to gradually so that you don't stress your fish.

The Milky Tank Conundrum

So, my tank water was a greeny yellow and there were white fibers on everything in my tank. In a panic I did a 100% water change and cleaned all the gravel and plastic plants in my tank and then added all new fresh water from my tap. Everything was great for a few days, the water sparkled it was so clean. The fish seemed happy and one of my large gold fish's fin rot was gone and his fin was growing back. Then, over the course of a few hours the water turned milky white and I can't see anything in the tank it's so cloudy. I fixed it with a 50% water change, but I still don't know what caused it…

Solution – Actually, It's New Tank Syndrome

The greeny yellow water color along with the white fibers that you had originally was more than likely due to various types of algae and fungus. Then after the 100% water change and thorough cleaning (with chlorinated tap water) you probably killed all of the good bacteria that kept the cycle in your tank going. The milky white was a bacteria bloom which is temporary and would have gone away in a few days. This bloom is usually caused by too much cleaning in a tank that is not yet fully cycled. You will have to start your cycle over again and watch for spikes in ammonium.

All Good Things Must Come to an End

This eBook is by no means exhaustive in scope and, fortunately, it wasn't meant to be. If I had even half of the information in this book when I first started taking my aquariums seriously there would be a lot more fish alive today!

I hope you enjoyed reading this ebook as much as I enjoyed making it. Hopefully you will put this information to good use when you run into problems with your aquarium. And you WILL run into problems, believe me. At least with this information you will have a better grasp of the situation and you will not have to learn what I learned the hard way.

Be sure to visit my websites: www.ClownLoachFish.com & www.BalaShark.info for information specific to those fishes. While you're there, sign up for my weekly newsletter! It's great and it's FREE!

Until next time, stay fishy,

Bjorn Allpas