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Lyme Disease & Tick Bites – What You Need to Know

What is Lyme Disease?

Lyme Disease (Borreliosis) is an infection caused by the bite of an infected tick, carrying the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is present in large parts of Europe, the UK and USA. Ticks are most commonly found on dogs, although if you enjoy spending time walking outdoors, or cuddling your dog who has been running about in undergrowth, then you may find ticks on yourself.



What are the Symptoms of Lyme Disease?

A red rash called Erythema Migrans can develop after a few days or weeks after a tick bite. The rash can slowly enlarge with the central area fading over time, and may appear in a different place to the site of the tick bite. However about >30% of people never develop a rash. Flu symptoms and at a later stage fatigue, muscle aches and arthritis can present themselves. Recurring joint pain and arthritis can occur during the lifetime of an infected person.



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At its most serious level and if left undiagnosed, Lyme Disease can lead to neurological problems, cardiac arrest and organ failure.

Where Can Ticks Be Found?

Ticks like humid, damp environments where there is dense vegetation. They can be found in gardens and urban parks, but generally woodland, heathland, moorland, rough pasture, and forests are their preferred sites. If you are walking anywhere where there is long grass, you should be aware of the risk of tick bites.

How Do Ticks Pass on the Disease?

Ticks are very small (often looking like small specs of dirt), blood-sucking arthropods that feed on the host's blood. Ticks cannot fly or jump; they perform a behaviour known as "questing", where they climb onto vegetation and undergrowth waiting for a passing animal or human to catch their hooked front legs. The most common tick to bite humans is the Sheep Tick and not all ticks carry infection.

Once on your skin they may not bite immediately, and instead crawl to a suitable site on your skin, particularly humid areas e.g. behind the knees, groin and arm pits.

Tick bites can be painless, so you may feel nothing. Once a tick starts to feed on your blood, they can swell to the size of a small pea. If you don't discover the tick, it can feed on your blood for about 5-7 days before dropping off.

The longer the tick is attached to you, the greater the risk of infection.



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How to Protect Yourself from Tick Bites

- Wear long trousers tucked into your socks & long-sleeved tops.
- Wear light coloured clothing to help you spot ticks on your clothes.
- Spray exposed skin with a tick repellent for humans, such as the Saltidin insect repellent, Repel Midge.
- Check yourself, your dog and your children for ticks after returning from a walk outdoors. Ticks tend to bite below the waist in adults and above the waist on children; so check the neck and scalp of your child.
- Brush off any ticks on your clothing before you go inside.
- Keep to marked paths and avoid long grass
- Wear shoes rather than flip flops
- Treat your backpack, tent or outdoor kit with a Fabric Spray
- Ticks can remain on clothing; so wash and tumble dry clothes on a high heat after use

Tick Removal

If you find a tick, remove it quickly using a tick remover tool (available from most outdoor shops) or using a pair of clean tweezers. Do not use your fingernails to remove a tick.

Holding the tick as close to your skin as possible, gently grip the tick and pull steadily upwards away from the skin, without twisting.

Don't crush or squeeze its body, use Vaseline, nail varnish remover, burn it with a match, or use alcohol as these methods can increase the chance that a tick vomits the infectious bacteria (*Borrelia*) into you before it is removed. If the tick's head or any part gets stuck in your skin, seek medical attention.

Place the tick in a small jar to make identification easier and do not release it into your garden, to avoid it attaching itself onto your skin again!

Use an antiseptic to clean the bite area after removing the tick and wash your hands.



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Is There a Treatment?

Yes Lyme Disease can be treated if diagnosed early enough. A long course of antibiotics is usually prescribed by doctors.

It is best to stay protected from ticks in the first place by following the advice above. Particularly if you are on a backpacking or camping trip, it is important to check yourself carefully for ticks every day after you stop walking.

Every effort is taken to ensure that the information published on this website is accurate and informative. It is not intended to replace a consultation with an appropriately qualified medical practitioner.

Sources:

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3. Lyme Disease Action <http://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/about-ticks>, 2015
4. Stay Well Travel, http://www.staywelltravel.co.uk/9-blog/101-spotlight-on-lyme-disease/p_article, 2015

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