Lyme Disease Overview

Lyme Disease is transmitted primarily through the bite of the deer tick (*Ixodes dammini*).

What are ticks?

Deer ticks are tiny, about the size of a sesame seed. They cannot fly. They move about the ground slowly, or settle on tall vegetation. From here they wait until they can attach themselves to a human or other warm-blooded animal as they walk by. It will then crawl about looking for a good place to attach itself to you. Once attached, it will suck blood from you, eventually swelling up to the size of a raisin. It is during this process that it can transmit the bacteria that causes Lyme Disease. The tick can remain on you for up to 48 hours, after which time it will simply drop off.

Tick bites may or may not itch.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease

Lyme Disease is not deadly, but it can be very debilitating if left untreated. Its symptoms progress in 3 stages.

First Stage Symptoms (usually within a few days to a month after bite)
Please note: Not all instances of ticks transmitting Lyme Disease will produce these symptoms, especially the rash!

- Flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, fatigue, fever, muscle aches, stiff neck, nausea.
- A rash, either at the site of the tick bite or elsewhere on the body. The circular or oblong rash may increase in size and have well-defined margins with central clearing, giving it a characteristic "bulls-eye" appearance. It begins as a small, red, raised area that expands in size, sometimes reaching 20 inches or more in diameter.
- The rash may or may not burn or itch.

These early symptoms usually disappear only to have more serious problems develop later.

Second Stage Symptoms (several weeks to several months after the tick bite)

- Heart problems
- Nervous system disorders

Third Stage Symptoms (several months to a year or more)

- Recurrent attacks of swelling and pain in large joints, especially the knees
- More severe neurological problems

Treatment of Lyme Disease

One of the problems with Lyme Disease is that its symptoms are so easily confused with other disorders or diseases.

Lyme Disease is most easily diagnosed in the first stage. It is also easily treated with antibiotics at this stage.

Helpful Hints to Deal With Ticks

This is simply a list of possible things to do to avoid ticks. You may not agree with some of the suggestions (such as the use of DEET, which may have its own health risks).

- Wear light-colored clothing. It makes ticks easier to spot.
- Don't walk bare-legged in tall grass, woods, or dunes where ticks may be found.
- Wear long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. This will delay the time it takes the tick to find an attachment site. Wear closed footwear and socks, not sandals. Tuck your pants into your socks.
- Use an insect repellent that has DEET. Apply it to your skin and outer clothing. Avoid your eyes and mouth, as well as cuts and scrapes. *Please note that the use of DEET may carry its own set of risks.*
- Put a tick and flea collar on your pet and check pets for ticks periodically.
- Search your body well for ticks daily. Pay special attention to areas such as groin, scalp and armpits. Use a mirror to check parts of your body that you can't see directly, or have someone else check.
- Stay on groomed paths.