

MANAGING YOUR LYME DISEASE

What Is Lyme Disease?

Lyme disease is an infection that affects many parts of the body, including the skin, joints, and nervous system. This illness was first recognized in 1975. More than 150,000 cases have been reported in the United States since 1980. It's named for the Connecticut town where the first case was found. Most cases occur in the Northeast US, but cases have also been reported in several other states including California, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

What Causes Lyme Disease?

A bacteria named *Borrelia burgdorferi* causes it. A tick bite passes bacteria to people. Generally, a tick must be attached for at least 24 hours before it can transmit the bacteria. Deer often carry these ticks.

What Are the Symptoms of Lyme Disease?

People may only have one or a few symptoms before the disease is diagnosed and treated. Early symptoms are flu-like ones: headache, joint and muscle pain, fever, chills, fatigue, and enlarged lymph glands. A rash may appear on the site of the tick bite, often on the armpit, groin, or thigh. It can be raised or flat, and is red with a white area in the middle that looks like a bull's-eye. It may last for a few days.

Untreated flu-like symptoms may get worse. Neck stiffness, shortness of breath, chest pain, and dizziness may occur. Then, without treatment, people may develop arthritis-like symptoms in joints, rash, continued fatigue and heart problems, and neurological symptoms, such as confusion, weakness in the face, arm, and legs; or even paralysis in the face.

How Is Lyme Disease Diagnosed?

The health care provider will do a physical examination and take a medical history. Living or recent travel in areas of high prevalence, such as New England, makes the diagnosis more likely. The health care provider will ask about recent tick bites or outings to wooded areas or fields where deer ticks live. Deer ticks are so small, you may not even know you were bitten. Most people with Lyme disease do not remember getting bitten by a tick or having a bull's-eye type of rash. The health care provider will do a blood test to check for antibodies to the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. The health care provider may do other tests to rule out illnesses with similar symptoms.

How Is Lyme Disease Treated?

Early treatment with antibiotics is usually very effective. If the illness is very advanced, symptoms may not completely go away. The duration of therapy and type of antibiotic used depend on the stage of the disease. Different medicine is used for young children and pregnant women. During antibiotic treatment, acetaminophen or nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can be used for pain. Other types of treatment may also be necessary, for example, for heart or neurological problems.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Lyme Disease

- ✓ **DO** take antibiotics as directed.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if your symptoms don't improve or you have side effects from medicine.
- ✓ **DO** avoid getting bitten by a tick. Avoid areas where ticks live, especially in spring and summer when they are most numerous. Wear protective clothing when you're out in the

woods or other areas where deer ticks live. Use insect repellent containing the chemical called DEET.

- ✓ **DO** check your body for tick bites after any possible exposure to ticks.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have new or unexplained symptoms.
- ✓ **DO** visit your health care provider if you develop an expanding rash at the site of the tick bite.
- ⊗ **DON'T** wait to see whether side effects from medicines go away.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Arthritis Foundation: Tel: (800) 283-7800; Website: <http://www.arthritis.org>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Websites: <http://womenshealth.gov>

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