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PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Lyme Disease

Topic Overview

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an infection that is spread by ticks. You can get Lyme disease if you are bitten by an infected tick. But most people who have had a tick bite do not get Lyme disease. It's still important to see your doctor if you have a tick attached to you that you can't remove.

Lyme disease is common in the United States. It can also be found in Canada, Europe, and Asia.

What causes Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria. Infected ticks spread the bacteria by biting people or animals.

Two types of ticks carry the Lyme disease bacteria in the U.S. They are:

- [Deer ticks](#) 📷. They spread the disease in the Northeast and Midwest.
- [Western black-legged ticks](#) 📷. They spread the disease along the Pacific coast, mostly in northern California and Oregon.

[Remove ticks](#) 📷 as soon as you notice them. Infected ticks usually don't spread Lyme disease until they have been attached for at least 36 hours.

What are the symptoms?

One sure sign of Lyme disease is a [round, red rash](#) 📷 that spreads at the site of a tick bite. This rash can get very large.

Flu-like symptoms are also very common. People in the early stages of Lyme disease may feel very tired and have headaches, sore muscles and joints, and a fever.

These symptoms can start at any time, from 3 days up to a month after you have been bitten. Some people don't have any symptoms when they are in the early stages of Lyme disease. And they may not even remember getting a tick bite.

If Lyme disease goes untreated, you can have more serious symptoms over time. These include:

- Swelling and joint pain (like [arthritis](#)).
- Tingling and numbness in your hands, feet, and back.
- A lack of energy that does not get better.

- Trouble focusing your thoughts.
- Poor memory.
- Weakness or [paralysis](#) in your face muscles.

How is Lyme disease diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms. If you have a round, red rash, it can be a sure sign of Lyme disease. Your doctor will also ask about your activities to try to find out if you have been around infected ticks. You may have a blood test to see if you have certain [antibodies](#) in your blood that could mean you have the disease.

How is it treated?

The main treatment for Lyme disease is [antibiotics](#). These medicines usually cure Lyme disease within 3 weeks of starting treatment.

It's important to get treatment for Lyme disease as soon as you can. Talk to your doctor if you have had a tick attached to your skin, especially if you live in an area where Lyme disease has been reported. Look for early signs of the disease, such as a round, red rash that gets bigger or symptoms like you'd get with the flu.

If it goes untreated, Lyme disease can lead to problems with your skin, joints, nervous system, and heart. These can occur weeks, months, or even years after your tick bite. The problems often get better with antibiotics, but in rare cases they can last the rest of your life.

Can you prevent Lyme disease?

The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to protect yourself from ticks. Cover up as much skin as you can when you're going to be in wooded or grassy areas. Wear a hat, a long-sleeved shirt, and long pants with the legs tucked into your socks. And keep in mind that it's easier to see ticks on light-colored clothes.

Use a bug spray that has the chemical DEET to repel ticks. You can spray it right on your skin. Check your pets for ticks after they've been outside. You can't get Lyme disease from your pet. But your pet can bring infected ticks inside. These ticks can fall off your pet and attach to you.

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