



Lyme Disease

What is it?

Lyme disease is an illness that can result in skin, joint, heart, and nervous system problems. It affects people of all ages and may last months or years if not treated correctly. Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne disease in Texas.

What causes it?

A special type of bacteria called a spirochete causes Lyme disease. This bacteria is usually transmitted by the bite of a tick.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of Lyme disease can occur in two stages: early and late (disseminated).

Early Symptoms

Three to 30 days after exposure, symptoms which mimic the “flu” appear, including fever, headache, tiredness, stiff neck or neck pain, muscle aches, and joint pain. Except for the tiredness, which may be constant, the symp-

toms tend to come and go. Fever is usually low, but sometimes becomes high, especially in children.

About one-third of people with early Lyme disease have a skin rash called erythema migrans or EM. This rash starts out as a small red area around the tick bite. As it gets bigger, the center of the rash may become lighter colored. Sometimes the center remains red and hard and has blisters which burst and form a heavy dark scab.

Late Symptoms

If early Lyme disease is not treated, other symptoms may occur. These symptoms, which can affect the heart, joints, or nervous system, may begin days, weeks, months, or even years later.

Heart problems: Some patients will have heart problems such as an unusually forceful rapid, or irregular heart beat. These problems usually last a short time (one to six weeks) and rarely recur.

Joint problems: About 40% of Lyme disease patients will develop severe pain or swelling of the joints. Attacks last for a few days and may recur.

Nervous system problems: Two-thirds of Lyme disease patients have problems sleeping, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, mood swings, and numbness or weakness in the arms, legs, or face. Some patients may develop chronic fatigue, psychiatric problems, or a multiple sclerosis-like illness.

Diagnosis

1. People who have an expanding rash with a lighter colored center after a tick bite have Lyme disease.
2. Without a rash, the diagnosis of Lyme disease is based on the patient’s signs and symptoms plus his or her exposure history. Results from a blood test may help make the diagnosis.

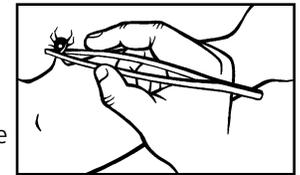
Treatment

Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics. If you think you may have Lyme disease, see your doctor immediately. Treatment is most likely to be successful when it is started early.

Protective Measures

The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to avoid ticks. When in tick-infested areas, wear light-colored clothing so ticks can be easily seen. Tuck pant legs into boots or socks and shirt into pants so that ticks can not get to the skin. Use insect repellent (follow package instructions). Inspect yourself for ticks every few hours; promptly remove any ticks to lower the risk of getting Lyme disease.

To remove a tick, use tweezers to grasp the tick at the surface of the skin. If tweezers are not available, use a



tissue to protect your fingers (the tick’s body fluids may contain Lyme disease bacteria). With a steady motion, pull the tick straight out. Live ticks can be sent to the Texas Department of Health Laboratory for testing. For information about tick testing, call your local health department or (512) 458-7228.

It is also important to keep pets free of fleas and ticks. Besides bringing ticks into or around the house, pets can also get Lyme disease.

For more information about Lyme or other tick-borne diseases, contact the Texas Department of Health or visit www.TickTexas.org