

Lyme Disease

Lyme Disease is caused by an infection carried by deer ticks. These ticks may be as small as the head of a pin and may be difficult to see. However, they typically crawl on the body for hours before attaching themselves, and they can easily be washed away by a washcloth.

Most cases of Lyme Disease have been reported in the Northeastern United States. The disease responds extremely well to early treatment. It is important that if you exhibit the signs of Lyme Disease infection that you seek medical attention without delay.

Typically, the first symptoms of infection – a red area around the site of the tick bite – appear within a week to a month of being bitten by a tick. The area may sting, itch or burn. The lesions begin as a red pimple which takes on a circular pattern and then expands outward, becoming a larger circle. There may be several red rings, one around the other. Other symptoms can include headache, fever, chills, sore joints (similar to that experienced with the flu), nausea, vomiting and severe fatigue. These symptoms usually disappear on their own, without treatment, within two months.

As the disease progresses, the patient may have cardiac symptoms such as palpitations or fainting. Such problems are seen in about 10 percent of untreated patients. These symptoms typically last a few days to a few months. In this second stage of Lyme Disease, neurological symptoms can also be present, such as severe headache, nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light. Encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain, can occur. People in this stage of Lyme Disease may also suffer from lethargy, decreased concentration, fatigue, poor memory, emotional instability and irritability.

Weeks, months or years later, an untreated patient will move to the third, advanced stage of Lyme Disease. In this stage, about half of untreated patients will have rheumatologic symptoms such as joint soreness, joint swelling and arthritis, most commonly in the knees. These attacks can last only a few hours or several days. Initially, the episodes are intermittent, but they become more chronic and sustained over time.

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