

# LYME DISEASE

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

6.6

### DESCRIPTION

An inflammatory disorder caused by an infected tick bite that is characterized by a skin rash, followed in weeks to months by symptoms in the central nervous system, cardiovascular system and joints. Named for Lyme, Connecticut, where it was first described, it's often confused with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis of children. Lyme disease is still uncommon.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

*Stage 1:*

- A rash (called erythema migrans) that starts as a small red spot. The spot expands and becomes round or oval in shape with a clear center. It resembles a bulls-eye.
- Mild flu-like symptoms may occur (fever, headache, stiff neck, fatigue, muscle and joint pain).

*Stage 2:*

- Rash develops on other places of the body.
- Single-joint pain or body pain.
- Central nervous system symptoms that may range from headache to loss of consciousness.

*Stage 3 (may occur months to years after first stage):*

- The nerves, joints, heart, and brain may be seriously affected causing a number of new symptoms.

### CAUSES

Infection with spirochete (germ), *Borrelia burgdorferi*, transmitted by a deer tick bite. Many patients report a tick bite at the site of the lesion three to thirty days prior to the rash.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

Areas where ticks are numerous, such as long grass or brush. More common in the northeast, mid-atlantic, and upper north central united states.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear protective clothing with tight collars and cuffs.
- Use effective insect repellents, with DEET, in areas with ticks.
- Have dogs and cats wear tick-repellent collars.
- Careful skin inspection; removal of any ticks. If the tick is removed from the skin within 24 hours, there is very little chance for infection. Wash the area with soap and water following the removal of the tick.

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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

The skin rash is curable in some patients in ten days with treatment, and this may prevent development of other symptoms. If not, symptoms in the joints, central nervous system and cardiovascular system usually subside slowly over two to three years. Symptoms often recur after several years without another tick bite.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Various degrees of persistent joint or nervous system pain, fatigue, memory problems, and other symptoms.
- Rarely, death may occur.

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may include blood studies and others to help confirm the diagnosis.
- Early treatment with antibiotic drugs is important to prevent symptoms from getting worse.
- Use crutches to keep weight off affected joints, if necessary.
- Heat relieves joint pain. Take warm baths or showers, or use heating pads.

### MEDICATION

An oral antibiotic for 14-21 days for early stage of the disease. Intravenous antibiotics may be prescribed for late stages. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Cortisone drugs to reduce the inflammatory response in the heart or central nervous system.

### ACTIVITY & DIET

Rest in bed until symptoms of active inflammation subside. Then resume normal activities gradually. No special diet.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- You have symptoms of Lyme disease.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.



Southern  
Illinois University  
Carbondale

**618-453-3311**

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.