

Prepare for a High Tick Population this Spring

By Alexis Chesney MS, ND, LAc

Lyme disease is a preventable infectious disease transmitted through a tick bite. An organism called *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a specific type of bacteria called a spirochete, causes Lyme disease. Prepare for a high tick population this spring, as it has been a mild winter. We have not had much of a break, as I remember the ticks were still biting in early December.

In 2010, the CDC reported that New Hampshire had the second highest, Vermont had the fifth highest and Massachusetts had the eighth highest incidence, of confirmed cases of Lyme disease in the United States. Contrary to popular belief, fewer than half of patients with Lyme disease recall a tick bite. Fewer than half of patients with Lyme disease recall a “bull’s eye” rash, which may appear three to 30 days after the tick bite. The following symptoms may develop up to 30 days after the bite: flu-like symptoms, joint pain or swelling, muscle pain, numbness or tingling, facial palsy.

Prevention is the best medicine. Here are some tips that will help you prevent tick-borne illness:

- Avoid areas that are wooded or bushy with high grass, and leaf litter, which are preferable to ticks.
- Be mindful that ticks are active and may bite on warm winter days – it only takes 28 degrees Fahrenheit for a tick to become active.
- Wear long sleeves and pants that are light colored. Tuck pants into socks.
- Conduct a complete body check for ticks when returning indoors.
- Place clothes in the dryer for 15 minutes, as ticks may survive a washing machine but not the hot dryer.
- Check pets regularly for ticks.
- Create tick repellent with Rose Geranium essential oil. In a spray bottle mix:
 - 1 ounce of Rose Geranium
 - 1 teaspoon of alcohol
 - 8 ounces of water
- Create a tick-free area in your yard:
 - Create dry non-wooded areas, as ticks thrive in wet wooded areas.
 - Clear tall grass and leaves.
 - Keep wood in dry areas.
 - Prevent deer from entering yard. Use deer-resistant plants or Dial soap.
- Early tick removal reduces the risk of infection:
 - Use tweezers to grasp the mouthpart of the tick close to the skin. Tick twisters or a tick key are more efficient than using tweezers.
 - Do not grasp or squeeze the body of the tick, as this may force the organisms carried by the tick into the person.
 - Pull the tick very firmly and straight out.
 - Do not use Vaseline, alcohol or burn the tick.
 - Watch for symptoms: fatigue, headache, chills, fever, muscle/joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, Erythema Migrans (bull’s eye rash) over the next few weeks.
 - Contact your health care provider if you cannot remove the tick and for antibiotic treatment after a tick bite.

It is recommended that you make an appointment with a Lyme literate health care provider if you:

- Have been bitten by a tick.
- Find a bull’s eye rash on your body.

- Experience unexplainable intermittent fevers, fatigue, malaise, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, facial paralysis, memory loss.

The standard **treatment** in the medical field for *acute* Lyme disease includes a course of antibiotics. *Late stage* Lyme disease presents similarly to acute Lyme disease with regards to the flu-like symptoms, joint pain or swelling, muscle pain, numbness or tingling, or facial palsy. At this point, these symptoms come and go in cycles, the joint pain (if present) migrates from place to place, and neurological symptoms may begin. It will most likely require a longer course of antibiotics. There are various strategies in using pharmaceutical and herbal antibiotic therapies, as well as addressing other needs the body has while treating for Lyme disease.

As a naturopathic physician, I believe it is important to **treat the whole person** and not just the infection. In order to fight the infectious disease, it is important to consider other factors that are often a part of the picture in order to optimize health:

- Optimizing diet, sleep, stress reduction
- Boosting the immune system and detoxification organs
- Investigating food allergies and hypoglycemia
- Addressing endocrine function (i.e., thyroid gland, adrenal gland)
- Preventing Candida and gastrointestinal upset during antibiotic treatment

Lyme disease is becoming more prevalent in this area. Enjoy the outdoors this season, but remember to conduct a full body check for ticks after you brush your teeth each night – it only takes a minute!