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What is Lyme?

Lyme disease or Lyme Borreliosis is the illness resulting from being bitten by an infected tick, which is more specifically carrying the bacteria *Borrelia*. Infected ticks are also known to carry an array of co-infections in addition to Lyme Borreliosis, examples of which are *Babesia*, *Bartonella*, *Ehrlichia*, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever & Tick-Borne Encephalitis.

Signs & Symptoms of Lyme Disease

Initial signs & symptoms of Lyme disease will vary between individuals, but the most common presentation of early stage Lyme is a collection of symptoms which can appear as a Flu-like illness.

- Chills & fever
- Fatigue
- Muscle & joint aches & pains
- Headache & stiff neck
- Sore throat
- Palpable lymph nodes
- Facial palsy
- Generalised rashes.
- More specifically in 'some' cases a localised circular , bulls-eye shaped rash, known as an EM (Erythema Migrans).

Late stage, chronic Lyme can cause more than 70 symptoms, affecting the entire body including both the nervous system, heart & brain. If initial Lyme treatment is delayed or inadequate, the repercussions to an individuals health & life can be extensive, long-lasting & debilitating.

Removing a Tick

Where a tick is attached/embedded the safe & effective method of removal is paramount.

- Use a tick-tool or fine tip tweezers to remove a tick.
- Use a steady but firm movement & even pressure.
- Ensure the whole tick is carefully removed, including the head & mouth parts.
- Dispose of tick safely.
- Don't use chemicals, matches or solvents, it aggravates a tick causing more problems.
- Post removal ensure thorough disinfection of your hands & tools used.
- Clean affected areas of skin & monitor wound carefully.

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Diagnosing & Treating Lyme

The diagnosis & treatment of Lyme has become more than often a complex process & with significant limitations. Remember that ticks can be as small as a poppy seed & you may not see an embedded tick or even know you have been bitten.

Should you have been bitten by a tick and/or are presenting symptoms or illness & suspect a bite, it is always best practice to seek advice from a medical professional. In the first instance this will be a GP. If showing a severe reaction it may require emergency treatment at hospital.

You can request a specific Lyme disease blood test, which involves a two-tiered testing method. It screens the blood for antibodies to the bacteria that causes Lyme. Should the first part, the Elisa come back positive, a GP may then request the second part, the Western Blot for a more conclusive result. The current testing is questionable & there is increasing inaccuracy & high numbers of false negatives. This can mean patients may go un-diagnosed or mis-diagnosed for many months or even years. A clinical diagnosis should then be considered for many patients.

According to the current NHS treatment guidelines, a case presenting as Lyme will be treated with a 3 week course of antibiotics. It is important to complete the course in full even if you start to feel better to ensure you have given your body the best chance to eradicate the bacteria.

There may be individuals whose symptoms persist & in these cases it may give argument for an additional or extended course of antibiotic treatment. This may be continued oral medication or for some individuals intravenous antibiotics may be needed where treatment has been delayed as long-lasting symptoms can persist.

Be Tick Aware ...Prevention is better than cure.



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