

Avoid ticks (and lyme disease) this summer

May 15 2023, by Cara Murez



The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to not get bitten by a tick, or to get it off your body within 24 hours.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy the great outdoors. Experts from Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston offer some tips for keeping ticks away.

"Lyme's manifestations can be perplexing," professor of immunology [Dr. Linden Hu](#) said in a school news release. "And its effects are far-reaching. Our best strategy for tackling it is to prevent its occurrence, and the best way to do that is to get rid of it at its source."

Nearly a half-million people in the United States contract Lyme disease each year.

Ticks carrying the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* pass it to humans by a bite. That bite causes the bacteria to migrate through the skin and sometimes into the bloodstream.

Antibiotics offered soon after can help most people.

Blood tests can take several weeks to turn positive, however, so recognizing the early symptoms is important.

They include a rash that develops after you've spent time outdoors, especially if it has a bullseye or circular shape that expands over a day or two.

Undiagnosed cases of Lyme can lead to serious complications, including arthritis, meningitis and heart problems. About 10% to 20% of people experience persistent fatigue, [joint pain](#), mental impairment and other symptoms lasting for months to years.

Hu is working with a team from the Maine Medical Center and Tufts' Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine to try to eradicate Lyme by 2030.

Meanwhile, when you're spending time outdoors, the experts advise avoiding tall grass and dense brush. Stay toward the middle of hiking trails.

"Ticks have an incredible ability to hitchhike," said [Sam Telford III](#), professor of infectious disease and global health at the Cummings School.

Wear light-colored clothing so you can easily spot the dark-colored bugs. Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and closed-toed shoes, tucking your pants legs into your socks.

"Deer ticks alone can spread five different infections," Telford said in the release. "So many infectious agents occupy our woods."

Use proven repellents, containing at least 20% DEET.

Spray repellent on your skin, ideally in an open area, according to the directions on product labels.

DEET can be used on children and infants older than 2 months, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Avoid applying the product to children's hands and around the eyes and mouth. Children under age 10 shouldn't apply repellent to themselves.

Consider spraying clothing, shoes and camping gear with insecticides that contain 0.5% permethrin, following label instructions and applying the chemical in a well-ventilated area.

Keep the spray and any still-wet treated items away from cats, because permethrin is toxic to them.

Do regular [tick](#) checks when you're outside, even if you're dressed

defensively, and check again every time you come indoors.

Take a shower and feel for new bumps on soapy skin. This can also wash away the tick before it has a chance to bite.

Pay special attention to areas where ticks try to hide, including under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the [belly button](#), behind the knees, between the toes, under hair, in groin areas and near the waist.

Wash clothing after time spent outdoors.

Ticks can transmit Lyme disease after being attached 36 to 72 hours, so finding them earlier helps.

If you do find a tick, use pointed tweezers to remove it. Grasp the tick at its mouth, where it's attached to your skin. Pull back slowly, steadily and firmly, as you would do for a splinter. The tick will eventually ease out.

If you accidentally leave the head buried in the skin, leave it there. It will come out on its own as your skin sheds, the experts said.

After removing the tick, clean the area with soap and water.

If you develop a rash, call your doctor and ask for a Lyme test. But take note: Not all tick bites produce the bullseye or lead to any rash at all, Hu said.

It's important to also pay attention to how you're feeling. See a doctor if you have fatigue, fever, aches and pains, or headaches.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [Lyme disease](#).

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Citation: Avoid ticks (and lyme disease) this summer (2023, May 15) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-lyme-disease-summer.html>

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