

Lyme Disease - don't panic, just get informed

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



It is lyme time again. Almost everyone has heard about it and some of us are vaguely afraid of it. But do you really know what it is, how to protect yourself and when to call the doctor? Read on.

Lyme Disease is caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a bacterium that is passed to us by a tick bite. The good news is that it takes that tick 24 hours to actually give us Lyme Disease, so we have plenty of opportunity to foil his plans.

Our first goal should be to prevent the tick from jumping on us in the first place. Using a tick repellent containing DEET (no more than 30% DEET for kids) and wearing closed-toed shoes in grassy or wooded areas is a good start. I am supposed to tell you to always wear long sleeves and long pants, but I can't bring myself to do it. Have you ever gone hiking in August in long sleeves and long pants? I think that if you are hanging out in high-risk areas between April and October, you should assume that you might inadvertently pick up a little, black hitchhiker.

The next step is to find and eject the ticks before they have time to transmit Lyme Disease. Since you have 24 hours before they cause you any trouble, checking yourself carefully every day that you might be at risk should keep you safe. They are tiny so be sure to check everywhere: between your toes, behind your ears, and even between your legs.

If you find a tick, don't panic. Just grab him near to your skin and pull straight away from your body until he pops off. Be sure to mark the date on your calendar in case you need to tell your doctor about it.

Even if you do get infected, all is not lost. Lyme Disease is usually treatable when caught early, so your next step is to watch for a rash and other Lyme symptoms. The rash

is called erythema migrans (see above picture) and other possible symptoms include: fever, headache, fatigue, joint pain, and swollen glands. Be alert for a month or so because the rash can take between 3 and 33 days to appear. If you have found a tick on your body and develop any of these symptoms, call your doctor right away. The scary outcomes that you might have heard of, like arthritis, meningitis and nerve problems, are generally associated with **untreated** Lyme Disease.

So here are the Cliff notes:

- Keep ticks off by using repellent and cover-ups in wooded and grassy areas
- Check your body daily – be sure to eject any unwanted tenants within 24 hours
- If you find a tick, watch for signs of Lyme and call your doctor if they appear

Lyme Disease is preventable and you have the power.

Happy hiking!

(picture courtesy of Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene)

Dr. Chiamonte is a private Health Advocate and the founder of Insight Medical Consultants. She has been quoted by CNN, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today as an expert on patient advocacy.

www.InsightMedicalConsultants.com