

Lyme Disease.

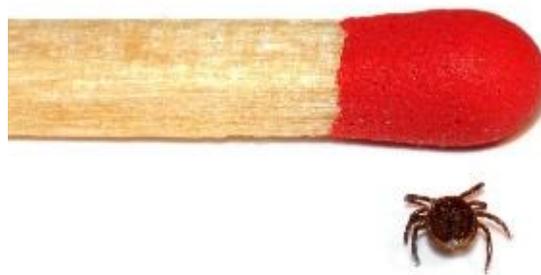
What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease, (borreliosis), is an infection spread to humans by ticks infected with the the borrelia micro-organism. The disease is spread by ticks when they bite the skin in search of blood. The disease is not contagious from an affected person to someone else and not all ticks carry the bacterium.

It is prevalent in the Scottish Highlands where an estimated 10% of all ticks carry the organism. People that live, work or play here in the countryside should be aware of the potential for ticks to cause health problems. Prompt removal of the tick before it becomes "engorged" is thought to reduce your risk to almost zero.

Ticks

A tick is a small, blood-sucking mite. It lives on blood from mammals, including deer, sheep and rabbits. It cannot jump or fly; it crawls. The tick sits on vegetation, including trees, waiting for a possible 'host' to walk by. If a tick attaches itself to someone, it will typically find its way to a warm, moist and dark place on the body (like the crotch or the armpit). It will then insert a probe into the skin and begin sucking blood. In most cases the tick will leave after a while, or the host will get rid of it without any harm having been done. But, occasionally, the tick carries a small micro-organism called *Borrelia* in its stomach. This is what causes Lyme disease.



A tick pictured alongside a match-head

A tick on the body doesn't usually cause any pain, but it is still important to get rid of it because of the risk of Lyme disease. Every year about 300-500 cases are reported.

Symptoms & Effects.

Lyme disease affects different areas of the body in varying degrees as it progresses. In over 80% of patients, the classic sign of early local infection is a circular, outwardly expanding rash called *erythema chronicum migrans*. This occurs at the site of the tick bite 3 to 32 days after being bitten. The rash is red, and may be warm, but is generally painless. (Lyme disease can progress to later stages even in patients who do not develop a rash.)



The rash, 'erythema chronicum migrans' which can develop within 3 to 32 days after being bitten with an infected tick.

Symptoms of Lyme disease include -

- * A skin rash, often resembling a bulls-eye

Later stages (weeks or months later)

- * Fever
- * Headache
- * Muscle pain
- * Stiff neck
- * Swelling of knees and other large joints
- * General 'flu-like' symptoms.

The disease can later produce abnormalities in the joints, heart, and nervous system. However, most cases of Lyme disease are curable with antibiotics.

Please bear in mind, if you are looking this up on the internet, that the pattern of illness with Lyme's disease encountered in the UK is not the same as the more aggressive form encountered in the USA. Many of the websites dealing with this illness are American and describe the situation in the USA, where Lyme's disease more often causes late stage problems.

When to seek medical help.

Late, delayed, or inadequate treatment can lead to late manifestations of Lyme disease which can be disabling and difficult to treat. It is important to know when to seek help. If you develop a spreading rash, (see photo example), after a tick bite, consult a doctor.

If you develop any late stage symptoms, and you have had a tick bite in the past, let your doctor know and he or she will check for the infection with a blood test. (The late stage symptoms are common to many other conditions, which makes diagnosis more difficult). Luckily it is still quite uncommon for late stage Lyme's disease to occur in Scotland.

Tick Removal.

Expert opinion suggests that prompt removal of an infected tick within 24 hours, reduces the risk of transmission to nearly zero; however the small size of the tick, especially in the nymph stage, may make detection difficult.

Ticks can be removed gently with special tweezers, (Tick Twisters), which are available for a small fee from various outlets including the Health Centre in Grantown. If you do not have ready access to these 'Tick Twisters', do bear in mind that it is important not to squeeze the tick during removal as this could have the detrimental effect of injecting the tick's infected stomach contents into you! (www.tick-twister.com)

Prevention.

Prevention is always better than cure. Therefore, because Lyme disease is transmitted by ticks attaching to the body, tick-bite avoidance techniques are important.

The use of insect repellent on skin and clothing can help. The tick will normally have to crawl over clothing to reach an accessible part of its human host and so the wearing of long trousers tucked into socks and long sleeves can protect the skin. Clothing, including footwear and chest waders should be frequently examined, both inside and out, for ticks. These small dark insects can be hard to see on dark clothing and so lighter coloured clothing should be considered.

Be aware that that ticks can find their way into your car and home from your own outdoor clothing. They will then be free to seek-out other hosts!

When you arrive home after a day in the country, it can be good practice to stand in front of a mirror and check yourself all over for ticks. Even if you have been wearing chest waders all day, there is still a chance that a tick will have got onto your clothing and crawled about until it found a nice spot to have a picnic!

A practical, common-sense approach to ticks and Lyme disease should ensure that you stay disease-free whilst fishing in Grantown on Spey.