

Lyme disease and how to avoid it

What's the worst that could happen when we go camping? Torrential rain and soggy mud on the groundsheet? A scary encounter with a wild animal? Neolithic toilet arrangements?

by VERONICA HUGHES, Chief Executive of Caudwell LymeCo Charity

Unexpectedly, it's a tick bite! These arachnids spread Lyme disease, a debilitating illness which for some people proves very difficult to cure.

How do I prevent tick bites?

There are ticks everywhere in the UK. They climb onto you when you sit on grass or brush past plants.

- Wear clothes that cover your skin, especially your legs.
- Tuck clothes in. Tuck trousers tightly into socks or boots.
- Spray bug repellent containing deet and/or wear clothes sprayed with permethrin. Be thorough. Ticks crawl over skin coated in deet and bite the one part you missed. Deet can be used safely on any part of the body except the face.
- After a walk in the countryside, throw your clothes into the tumble dryer for 30 minutes to kill any ticks that may be on them.
- Use a picnic cloth. Don't sit directly on grass.

What do ticks look like?

Ticks inflate like balloons as they fill with blood, and change colour. Baby ticks are most likely to bite you – they are as tiny as a poppy seed.

How do I know if a tick has bitten me?

You will not feel a tick bite you or walk on your skin.

- Check everywhere.
- Have a 'tick buddy' to look at the places you cannot see.
- Check each other every four hours.

- Ticks like warm, soft crevices including the belly button, groin area (including genitals), armpits and between your toes or behind your knees.
- They like being under a snug waistband or bra strap.
- Ticks near the hair line can easily be hidden. They sometimes bite behind the ears or on the back of the neck where they are hidden under hair.

What do I do if I find a tick attached?

1. Do not delay removing the tick. Prompt removal reduces the risk of Lyme disease.
2. Use a tick remover tool or narrow pointed tweezers if possible. In an emergency, use long fingernails.
3. Lift straight upwards, pulling firmly and steadily. Never squeeze the tick's body.
4. Disinfect the bite area and wash your hands with soap.
5. If you don't manage to get the feeding parts out, the bite could go septic but this is not Lyme disease.
6. Don't pester the tick or rub or spray anything on it. This will make the tick more likely to vomit Lyme disease bacteria into your body.



Caudwell LymeCo charity offers reliable information and advice, as well as raising money for desperately needed research into Lyme disease. For facts, leaflets and lesson plans, visit caudwelllyme.com/info.

How will I know if I may have Lyme disease?

Getting prompt diagnosis and treatment for Lyme disease dramatically improves your chances of recovering without lifelong complications.

- Lyme disease symptoms take three days to three months to appear.
- The first symptoms can be like flu.
- Some people have an expanding rash with an outer ring.
- Many people with Lyme disease never noticed a tick bite.
- If you develop symptoms that could be Lyme disease, tell your doctor you have been camping and may have been bitten by a tick.