

## Research into Lyme Disease

A walk in the woods is generally good for us. However, one of the less pleasant risks is Lyme disease. It is the result of a bite by a small tick that has often been living on a deer.

Dr Evans and associates studied some 88 cases of this disease and made some interesting findings about its complications for the nervous system.



The first is that the disease seems to be becoming a bit more common. This may be because more of us go walking in the woods or live in rural areas. It is also a fact that doctors are picking up cases that may have once gone unrecognised.

### What is the disease like?

The disease can give a wide range of symptoms which may appear unrelated. It seems to be difficult to diagnose.

Some symptoms include:

- a) A rash (erythema migrans);
- b) Headache;
- c) Joint pain (arthralgia);
- d) Muscle pain (myalgia);
- e) Facial paralysis with shaking (facial palsy)
- f) Pain caused by infection of the nerves (radiculopathy);
- g) Various other nervous system problems.

If caught early most of the worst symptoms do not develop. The average patient did not receive treatment until about 3 weeks after infection. This seems to be due to delay in people going to the doctor, doubts about diagnosis and time needed for tests to come back.

## **The good news**

Firstly, it is fairly rare. Dr Evans and the team found only 88 cases in the Exeter district (about 350,000 people) in the period between 2000 and 2005.

Secondly, most people are completely cured. A few have some longer-term problems.

## **What should we do?**

Covering one's body while out walking will stop the ticks finding bits of us to eat.

Wearing light coloured clothes means that the ticks will show up.

If, after a day in the country we have any of the symptoms especially a rash around a tick bite it would be worth getting them checked out by a doctor.



The original research is in [Epidemiology and Infection](#) (2008), 136 : 1707-1711 and is by J. K. Lovett, P. H. Evans, S. O'Connell and N. J. Gutowski

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