Lyme Disease is a bacterial disease transmitted to us through the bite of an infected tick. In this post, we’ll cover what to do if you find a tick on yourself, and what signs and symptoms to look out for if you’ve been bitten.

As we mentioned in the Summer post, it’s important to take proactive steps to prevent tick bites, or, if you have been bitten, to reduce the amount of time a tick is on your body. Scientists believe that if you can safely remove them as quickly as possible within the first 12-24 hours, this will reduce your risk of the tick transmitting the Lyme bacteria to you.

Where do ticks attach?

What’s first, then? It’s important on returning from the outdoors to do a full body check. There are certain areas that ticks like in particular. For instance, ticks like to attach:

- To skinfolds
- And behind the knees

They like warm, moist parts of the body such as:

- The armpits
- Or groin

And sometimes ticks may attach to parts of the body you can’t see like:

- Your hairline
- Or your back

For these parts of the body, use a mirror or ask a friend or family member to check for ticks.

Children are most often bitten around the head and ears as they are lower to the ground, and the same goes for dogs and cats – check their muzzles and ears first before doing an all-over check.

What to do if you find a tick?

If you find a live, loose tick, don’t crush it between your nails, as this will release the bacteria. Instead, crush it in a tissue, or put it in a container.

What happens, though, if you’ve taken all the precautions, but a tick still manages to latch on? Firstly, don’t panic. Just because you’ve been bitten, it doesn’t mean you have Lyme Disease. Secondly, get yourself tooled up.

The safest way to remove a tick is by using a tick twister or a tick removal card. If using a tick twister, hook the tick close to the skin, rotate, and pull the tick away, applying even pressure. If using a tick card, hook the tick close to the skin and gently pull upwards. Once the tick is removed, clean the bite area with hot, soapy water, or an antiseptic wipe.

You can get tick removal devices from the office, petrol stations, or pet stores. For those regularly in the outdoors, make sure you carry a tick removal device in your first aid kit, and have some in your vehicle and around the house. A magnifying glass can also be handy to remove Larvae and Nymph size ticks.
What not to do?

You might have been passed down a few family methods for removing ticks, but it’s safest to stick to the tick twisters and tick removal card. Anything that distresses the tick will make it regurgitate its stomach contents into the bite area, and this includes the Lyme bacteria.

Therefore avoid:

- Butter
- Volatile oils
- Perfume
- Cigarettes, and heat in general
- Alcohol
- Vaseline
- And chemicals in general

Using anything that squeezes the tick will have the same effect, so household tweezers and fingernails are also not advised.

Use your mobile phone or digital camera to take a picture of the tick bite, and keep an eye on the bite area for the next few days and weeks for the signs and symptoms of Lyme Disease. And what should you look out for?

What to look out for?

In about two thirds of cases, a bulls-eye type rash might appear around the tick bite. This is known as Erythema Migrans, or spreading redness. Other symptoms are unfortunately very similar to many other illnesses, such as chronic fatigue. These include:

- Flu-like symptoms including tiredness, chills, fever, headache, and muscle and/or joint pain.
- Light sensitivity, stiffness, vomiting and headaches, known as Lyme meningitis.
- Shortness of breath, light-headedness and heart palpitation called Lyme carditis.
- Swollen glands in the armpit, groin or neck are possible.
- As well as blurred vision.
- Blue ear – a dark rash on the ear.

If you experience any of these signs and symptoms after a tick bite, you should visit your GP. It is important to tell them you work in the outdoors, have recently been bitten by a tick, and could have been exposed to Lyme Disease. Your GP may not do a blood test, as the antibodies take six to eight weeks to show, and an earlier test can result in a false negative. The good news, though, is that at this stage, the infection responds to treatment with antibiotics, either: Doxycycline 100mg bd, po for two to three weeks or Amoxicillin 500mg tds po for two to three weeks.

Dogs and cats can contract Lyme Disease too, so if you see any of the signs and symptoms on your pets, take them to the vets.
**Longer-term complications**

In some people, however, Lyme Disease can lie dormant in the system for long periods. If early signs and symptoms are not recognised, secondary complications can develop in some cases weeks, months, and even years after the initial infection.

In these cases, the joints, nervous system and the heart may be affected. These include:

- **Shifting joint pains**
- **Muscle pains**
- **Abnormal fatigue**
- **A sensation of burning**
- **Numbness of the skin**
- **Persistent headache**
- **Palpitations or irregular heartbeat**
- **And localised muscle loss**

These complications usually respond well to treatment, so prompt and correct diagnosis, and appropriate treatment, are important.

Prolonged symptoms can lead to a diagnosis of Late or Chronic Lyme Disease. Symptoms include:

- **Joint and muscle pain called Lyme Arthritis**
- **Neurological problems**
- **A skin rash**

If you experience any of these symptoms, you should again inform your GP, making sure to mention that you may have been bitten by a tick some time ago, as well as providing them with your work history.

Lyme Disease can be incredibly serious if left untreated, that's why preventative measures, and vigilant checking is important. If you can avoid a tick bite, or safely remove it within 12-24 hours, you can reduce your risk of Lyme Disease.