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# Lyme disease

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that can be spread to humans by infected ticks. It's usually easier to treat if it's diagnosed early.

## Symptoms of Lyme disease

Most people with early symptoms of Lyme disease develop a circular red skin rash around a tick bite.

The rash can appear up to 3 months after being bitten by a tick. Most rashes appear within the first 4 weeks. It usually lasts for several weeks.

Not everyone with Lyme disease gets the rash.



The rash can look like a bull's-eye on a dartboard.



The skin will be red and the edges may feel slightly raised.

Some people also have flu-like symptoms in the early stages, such as:

- a high temperature, or feeling hot and shivery
- headaches
- muscle and joint pain
- tiredness and loss of energy

## Most tick bites are harmless

Only a small number of ticks are infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. A tick bite can only cause Lyme disease in humans if the tick has bitten an infected animal.

### ⚠ Remove ticks as soon as possible

Be aware of ticks and remove them as soon as possible. Lyme disease can be prevented if infected ticks are removed quickly.

Ticks that may cause Lyme disease are found all over Ireland. The high-risk areas include grassy and wooded areas.

## How to remove ticks

Tick bites aren't always painful. You may not notice a tick unless you see it on your skin. Check your skin and your children's or pets' skin after being outdoors.

To remove a tick:

1. Use fine-tipped tweezers or a tick-removal tool. You can buy these from some pharmacies, vets and pet shops.
2. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible.
3. Slowly pull upwards, taking care not to squeeze or crush the tick. Dispose of it when you've removed it.
4. Clean the bite with antiseptic or soap and water.

The risk of getting ill is low. You don't need to do anything else unless you become unwell.



How to remove a tick.

### Talk to your GP if:

- you have symptoms of Lyme disease

Let the GP know if:

- you've been bitten by a tick
- you've never seen a tick on your skin but have spent time in woods or areas with long grass

## Diagnosing Lyme disease

Lyme disease can be difficult to diagnose. It has similar symptoms to other conditions and there is not always an obvious rash.

Blood tests help confirm or rule out Lyme disease. But these tests are not always accurate in the early stages of the disease.

You may need to be re-tested if you still have Lyme disease symptoms after a negative result.


## Treatment of Lyme disease

Your GP will prescribe [antibiotics](#) if they think you have Lyme disease.

Some people with severe symptoms will be referred to hospital for injections of antibiotics.

Most people with Lyme disease get better after antibiotic treatment. This can take months for some people, but the symptoms should improve over time.

If your symptoms last for a long time after treatment your GP may refer you to a specialist.



Some websites offer tests and treatment for Lyme disease. Speak to your GP before buying tests or treatment online.

## How to prevent tick bites

To reduce the risk of being bitten:

- cover your skin while walking outdoors and tuck your trousers into your socks
- use insect repellent on your clothes and skin – products containing DEET are best
- stick to paths whenever possible
- wear light-coloured clothing so ticks are easier to spot and brush off

## Ongoing symptoms

A few people who are diagnosed and treated for Lyme disease continue to have symptoms. For example, tiredness, aches and loss of energy. These can last for years.

These symptoms are often compared to fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

It's not clear why this happens to some people and not others.

Speak to your GP if your symptoms come back after treatment with antibiotics or if they don't improve.

[For more information visit the Tick Talk Ireland website](#)

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Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Page last reviewed: 23 June 2021

Next review due: 23 June 2024

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

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