

Signs and symptoms

Early diagnosis and proper antibiotic treatment of Lyme disease is important and can help prevent more serious forms of the disease. Contact your healthcare provider if you notice an expanding rash or other possible symptoms.

Signs and symptoms of early Lyme disease can include:

- An expanding skin rash, called erythema migrans
- Fatigue
- Chills and fever
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain
- Swollen lymph nodes

Erythema migrans is often a reddish or purple-colored rash that appears 3–30 days after the bite of an infected tick. It typically appears at the site of the tick bite, is round or oval, and expands gradually over several days. It can appear on any area of the body. The center of the rash sometimes clears as it enlarges, resulting in a “bull’s-eye” appearance. The rash may be warm, but it is rarely itchy or painful. Erythema migrans occurs in over 70 percent of people with Lyme disease.

Not all rashes that occur at the site of a tick bite are due to Lyme disease. An allergic reaction to tick saliva can also occur and be confused with an erythema migrans rash. Allergic reactions to tick saliva usually appear within a few hours after the tick bite, usually do not gradually expand in size, and disappear within a few days. A rash similar to erythema migrans has also been described following bites of the lone star tick. The condition has been named southern tick-associated rash illness (STARI), and the cause is unknown but it is not due to Lyme disease.

More severe forms of Lyme disease

Some signs and symptoms of Lyme disease may not appear until weeks or months after a tick bite:

- Arthritis with severe joint pain and swelling can occur, usually in one or more large joints, especially the knees.
- Nervous system symptoms can include numbness, pain, nerve paralysis (often of the facial muscles, usually on one side), and meningitis (fever, stiff neck, and severe headache).
- Rarely, irregularities of the heart rhythm can occur.

For a small percentage of people, symptoms of fatigue, body aches, or difficulty thinking can last after finishing treatment.

Reinfection

You can get Lyme disease again if you are bitten by another infected tick, so always protect yourself from tick bites.