

# HEALTH

With Lyme disease rates predicted to skyrocket this summer, protecting yourself is more important than ever. By Anne Marie O'Connor

Tick protection  
is vital to  
your health.



Mighty oaks may grow from little acorns, but so do white-footed mice, which carry Lyme disease-causing ticks. A profusion of acorns in 2016 (oak trees shed an increased number every three to five years) resulted in a spike in the mouse population, which is why experts are bracing for an increase in Lyme cases this summer. In addition, researchers at Columbia University have also discovered a few ticks that carry the Powassan virus, which can cause encephalitis. So this summer, it's more important than ever to be vigilant. Here's how:

When you're outdoors in grassy and wooded areas, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants and tuck the cuffs of your pants into your socks, says Gerald Simons, PA-C, a physician's assistant at the Morrison Center in NYC and a Lyme disease expert who helped launch the Physician Training Program for the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society.

"Wear light-colored clothing, which makes ticks easier to spot," advises Simons, who lives in East Hampton.

The CDC recommends using a repellent that contains at least 20 percent DEET on exposed skin. "Many people are concerned about using DEET due to its toxic reputation," Simons notes. But he recommends using it if you're spending time in tick-heavy areas. "The level of protection from occasional exposure to a chemical in a high-risk environment

outweighs the potential long-term consequences of a tick bite," he says.

Simons also suggests using natural repellents. "Essential oils—including rosemary, geranium, basil, cedar, cinnamon and lemon—are amazing at warding off ticks," he says. "Mix 25 drops of essential oil in three ounces of a carrier oil, like almond oil, to create a natural repellent and apply directly to skin.

"Ticks hate the scent of lavender," he says. "Use lavender soaps, detergents, shampoos and dryer sheets (you can even put them in your pockets)."

Taking two or three 400 mg capsules of astragalus daily may help prevent transmission of Lyme, he says.

Spray clothes, shoes and socks with a product containing 0.5 percent permethrin. Or you also can buy clothes pre-treated with permethrin at REI and L.L. Bean, Simons points out.

If you've been in a high-risk area, check for ticks while still outside, he says. (A lint roller can pick up small ticks on clothing.) Then shower as soon as possible and do another check. Use a hand-held or full-length mirror to inspect your whole body, including your belly button, groin, head and underarms. Also inspect children and pets.

Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing, then wash in hot water. Stay safe.