

Stop Ticks in Their Tracks

Warmer weather brings out the outdoor enthusiast in nearly all of us. Yet, working or playing in the outdoors increases your chances of unwittingly providing a meal to a tick – or worse. Ticks can infect you with Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, or other diseases.

Ticks live in warm and humid environments, usually in or near areas with shrubs and tall grasses, in woodlands, or near a body of water. To protect yourself from tick bites:

- **Spray all exposed skin with DEET** and your clothing with permethrin (both are chemicals that kill ticks on contact) or another tick repellent before going hiking. Ticks are most active April through October.

- **Wear light-colored clothing** to make it easier to spot ticks before they crawl onto your skin.
 - If you're heading into a tick zone, **minimize your exposed skin.** Wear a hat, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants with the cuffs tucked into shoes or socks. For extra protection, you can tape the area where pants and socks meet so ticks cannot crawl under your clothing.
- **Wear high boots.**
- **Walk in the center of trails** to avoid overhanging grasses and brush.

Check yourself and your pets frequently during outdoor activities – even when you're in your own backyard. After being outside, remove your clothing, and wash and dry it

at a high temperature. Inspect your body (or have someone else inspect it) carefully. If there is an attached tick, remove it with tweezers, grasping the tick as close to the skin as possible and pulling straight back with a slow, steady force. Put the tick in a sealable baggie or jar and store it in the freezer for a few weeks in case you develop a rash, fever, or other flu-like symptoms. If you do, see your doctor – and be sure to bring your tick along to help your doctor make a diagnosis.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2011.

Learn more about tick safety from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/Features/StopTicks/

What Your Family Health History Says About You

Quite a few common diseases, such as heart disease, run in families. Some rare ones do, too, including hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia. Tracing the diseases that run in your family can help your physician predict the diseases to which you might be at risk – and take action to keep you and your family healthy.

But if a family member has a particular disease, it does not mean that you'll develop the disease too. Most human diseases result from the interaction of heredity (things you *can't* change) with environmental factors and lifestyle choices (things you *can* change).

A useful family health history shows 3 generations of your first-degree blood relatives (you and your siblings, parents, and grandparents) and second-degree blood relatives (aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and first cousins). For each relative, try to identify:

- Date of birth and gender
- Any birth defects (e.g., cleft lip and heart defects)
- Learning problems or disabilities
- Vision or hearing loss at a young age
- Race/Ethnicity (e.g., Ashkenazi Jewish, African)

- Medical conditions (e.g., allergies, fibroid tumors, pregnancy loss, skin tags*)
- Disease conditions and age at first diagnosis (e.g., high blood pressure, stroke, cancer, diabetes, alcoholism, asthma, mental illness)
- Weight and height (If you don't know, just note if your relative was overweight or obese.)
- Health behaviors (e.g., smoking, physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, alcohol use, aspirin use)
- Environmental factors (e.g., sedentary job, regularly exposed to secondhand smoke)
- For deceased family members, their age and cause of death

Here's a family health tree tool: familyhistory.hhs.gov

Very few people have detailed and precise information about their entire family health histories. But any information can help. Vacations, holidays, and family reunions are great times to collect this information. If you are adopted, you might be able to gather information from your adoptive parents or from adoption agency records.

National Society of Genetic Counselors. 2011.

**Skin tags are more common in individuals with impaired carbohydrate metabolism and diabetes, and can also occur in a number of genetic conditions.*

Are Your Cleaning Products Safe?

Cleaning products help you remove dust, allergens, and germs from your home and office. But many products contain chemicals that cause eye, skin, or respiratory irritation. Here's how to protect yourself:

- Read and follow label instructions carefully. Meet or exceed any label precautions.
- Open windows to increase ventilation when using products that emit volatile gases.
- Buy only as much as you will use right away. Throw away partially full containers of old or unneeded cleaning products safely. Because gases can leak even from closed containers, this single step can lower concentrations of chemicals in your home.
- Contact your local waste management company to find out how to properly dispose of hazardous materials.
- Be sure that materials you decide to keep are stored in a well-ventilated area and are safely out of reach of children – up high or in a locked cabinet.
- Avoid or minimize your exposure to:
 - Corrosive or strongly irritating substances (e.g., oven cleaners and toilet bowl cleaners)
 - Substances classified as known or likely human carcinogens or reproductive toxicants (e.g., some carpet cleaners and laundry detergents)
 - Ozone-depleting compounds (e.g., certain aerosol sprays and dry cleaning chemicals)

- Limit your use of disinfectants to bathroom fixtures, doorknobs, and other high-touch surfaces. Cleaning walls and floors generally doesn't require the use of disinfectants.

Today, products that are safer for humans and for the environment are readily available. Look for products that are nontoxic and hypoallergenic. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends using products made from renewable resources (e.g., bio-based solvents from citrus, seed, vegetable, and pine oils) and also those designed for use in cold water to help conserve energy.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2011.

Read An A to Z Resource Guide of Safe Alternatives to Household Cleaning and Maintenance Supplies. tinyurl.com/3drhfwr

It IS Possible to Prevent Cancer

One out of every 3 women and 1 out of every 2 men will develop cancer sometime in their lifetime. While most cancers can be treated, it is still a very serious condition and remains the leading cause of death worldwide. (In the United States, cancer is the number-two cause.) The good news is that most cancers can be prevented by making positive lifestyle changes. The World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research compiled data from a large number of studies on diet and cancer risk. They discovered that many common cancers – including breast, colon, stomach, esophageal, and lung cancers – are linked to the foods we eat and other lifestyle factors. To lower your risk:

- **Eat at least 5 servings of fresh fruits and non-starchy vegetables daily.** Harvard University recommends at least 9 servings daily.
- **Aim for 2 or more servings of whole grains, legumes, nuts, or root vegetables at every meal.** (White potatoes are the exception, according to Harvard researchers, and should only be eaten sparingly).
- **Avoid red meat, processed meat, fatty foods** of animal origin (such as butter), and alcohol – all of which increase cancer risk.
- **Achieve an "energy balance" for a healthy weight.** To maintain your weight, take in as many calories through the day as you use up with physical activity. To lose weight, burn more calories than you eat.
- **Be active at least 30-60 minutes a day.** If your job is sedentary (as is the case with many of us) try taking an hour-long brisk walk daily.
- **Exercise vigorously** for a total of at least 1 hour a week.

These simple steps – along with avoiding all tobacco and getting regular medical exams – can have a huge impact on keeping your body free of cancer.

World Health Organization. 2011.

ASK THE WELLNESS DOCTOR

Q: Why do I hear ringing in my ears? And is there any way to make it stop?

A: Go to www.wellsource.info/wn/ask-tinnitus.pdf to read the answer from Don Hall, DrPH, CHES.

To ask your question, email: paulaw@wellsource.com, subject line: Ask the Wellness Doctor. Emails with any other subject line will be directed to the spam folder.

Health Challenge: "Assemble a First-Aid Kit & Complete a Safety Course" available at: www.wellsource.info/wn/hc-firstaid.pdf. Be prepared for accidents and emergencies. This month, assemble a first-aid kit and become certified in first aid or CPR.