



Ticks - how to avoid them; how to get rid of them

Nothing can make a person squirm like a tick can. The most fearless of outdoors enthusiasts cringe at the discovery of the little bugger crawling on their skin. Perhaps it's the idea of Lyme disease that makes us cautious of ticks. But the thought of them feeding on blood (ticks can take up to 100 times their body weight in blood) and swelling up to the size of a dime makes them even more freaky. Regardless, those little buggers give everyone the creeps.

Anyone venturing into the outdoors – campers, hikers, folks on a picnic – will be exposed to ticks. You will find them lurking in the brush on the riverside or the seashore, just waiting for their next meal. They live in the tall grass in or near wooded areas and cling to us when we brush by.

Here's a comforting thought: There are more than 850 different species of ticks out there. But only about 100 of these carry disease. The most serious of these are Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Lyme disease is carried by tiny Deer ticks (usually the size of the head of a pin), which are found mostly in the Northeast and Midwest – very rarely in Georgia. Rocky Mountain spotted fever is found throughout the United States, except in Maine, Alaska, and Hawaii. Most cases occur in the southeastern United States, including Georgia. The American dog tick, the lone-star tick, and the wood tick, all of which like wooded areas and tall, grassy fields, spread Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

The Tick-borne Disease Educational Foundation provides a list of preventive measures to minimize tick bites, what do if you find an attached tick, and the proper use of insect repellants.

You can reduce your chances of being bitten by:

- Wearing light colored clothing so ticks can be easily found

- Wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants

- Tucking pant legs into socks or boots and tucking shirts into pants

- Wearing a hat.

- Treating clothing and exposed skin with insect repellent containing DEET (Caution: Follow ALL product use safety precautions)

- Remove outdoor clothing immediately when you return home and launder at high temperatures.

- Inspect yourself for ticks and remove any that are attached.

You must be bitten by a tick that is carrying Lyme disease to actually get Lyme disease. But Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever can be acquired through touching the tick. **Don't remove ticks with your bare hands or crush them between your fingers, since the organisms that cause tick-borne diseases can often pass through human skin.**

Ticks usually are on your body a long time before they actually bite. You will probably feel them crawling around first. A shower will usually remove lingering ticks before they have a chance to bite. But you should always check yourself after being outside – and before you get back in your car from your outdoor adventure if possible. This is important: If you spend a lot of time outdoors, conduct frequent tick checks!

There are a lot of tick removal "myths" out there from pour gasoline on it, to light a match and burn it off, to smother it with Vaseline. Don't do it! These methods could cause the tick to expel the contents of its stomach into you.

To remove a tick, blunt tweezers work well (and should be carried in your first aid kit). Carefully scoop under the tick's body and pull slowly and gently. A slow and gentle pull will cause the mouth to release so the head doesn't get stuck. Do not twist, this may cause the head to break off. If the head remains, it could cause infection. After removing the tick, wash the area with soap and water and douse with some kind of antiseptic, such as rubbing alcohol. Wash your hands after handling a tick and try not to touch the tick. If the mouthpart remains stuck in the skin, you can try and remove or leave it in and it will eventually fall out. Be sure to disinfect the area and keep an eye on the area to make sure it doesn't get infected.

Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is treatable with antibiotics. If left untreated, it could become a problem. If you start to exhibit symptoms like fever, body aches, and rash see a doctor immediately.

To summarize, ticks are common and you will definitely see them if you enjoy the outdoors. However, tick borne disease is very uncommon. So don't worry, and enjoy your time in nature!