

LYME DISEASE / BORRELIOSIS

All mountain and country walkers should know a little of this potentially serious disease. It is a bacterial infection caused mainly by *Borrelia Burgdorferi*, and it is passed on to us by tick bites, which we encounter in long undergrowth and shrubbery. Only a small percentage of the ticks carry the infection so no need to panic if you find one attached to your skin. Remove it as soon as possible by grasping it as close to the skin as possible with tweezers and pulling slowly. If infected ticks are removed within 24 hours it is unusual for it to pass on the infection. Prophylactic antibiotics for uncomplicated tick bites are not recommended. Thereafter, keep an eye on the area of the bite because if you are infected, after several days, possibly as long as 30 days, you will develop a characteristic rash, called erythema migrans, which consists of a red ring which gradually migrates outward, and there may be a red spot in the centre, often referred to as a target lesion. It is important to note that an allergic reaction to almost any other insect bite will occur within a few minutes or hours, not after a delay of many days. You may also develop flu like symptoms. If you think you have the rash, you must seek medical help promptly, because in the early stages, once confirmed by blood test, it can almost always be cured with antibiotics. Neglected, it can cause widespread serious complications. There are several different types of blood test, which can be used but unfortunately they are not always in agreement, so if you have a negative blood test, but you had the typical rash, you must enquire about how many tests were done and if only one, ask for more. By the way, not all doctors are very aware of Lyme Borreliosis, so you may need to prompt them.

It is estimated that in UK, there are now between 2000 and 3000 cases each year, up to 30% contracted abroad. I can find no reliable estimate of the incidence in Spain, but most cases occur in the north and it becomes progressively less common as we move south. I did encounter a report of a series of 400 cases in Navara, so the overall incidence is probably in the thousands.

To avoid tick bites, the best way is to wear long trousers instead of shorts, at least in the warmer months, or alternatively to regularly use a good quality insect repellent, and carefully check your skin afterwards. Some ticks are very small and not easy to spot. I know of one definite case of Lyme Borreliosis in a CBM walker, and I have heard of one or two other cases but cannot confirm

Dr Geoff.

A short article on insect repellents will follow.