

Stages and Symptoms of Lyme Disease

While Lyme disease stages and associated symptoms tend to develop on the timeline described below, symptoms can appear earlier. Lyme disease stages can also overlap, and not everyone experiences all stages, or all symptoms of each stage.

Stage 1: Early localized Lyme disease

Timing: Within days or up to one month after a tick bite

Common symptoms include:

- Erythema migrans (EM) rash. The rash often has a bullseye or target-like shape but can also be solid red, blue-ish purple, or blotchy, and it can develop blisters or crust. EM rashes can look different on different people and different shades of skin, but all EM rashes expand over time (migrans means migrating). EM rash only occurs in people with Lyme disease. However, up to 30% of people with Lyme disease never develop or notice an EM rash.
- Fatigue, malaise, and lethargy (you might feel like you have the flu)
- Muscle or joint pain (without redness or swelling) that moves around (*is migratory*) and can appear in different places on different days
- Loss of appetite
- Swollen lymph nodes (anywhere on your body)
- Fever

Stage 2: Early disseminated (spread to other parts of the body) Lyme disease

Timing: Weeks to months after a tick bite

Common symptoms include:

- More than one EM rash suggestive of Lyme disease
- Intermittent or migratory pain in joints, tendons, muscles, and bones
- Inflammation of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis), which can cause severe headache, neck stiffness, and sensitivity to light and sound. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of meningitis.
- Numbness, weakness, or tingling in the arms and legs
- Weakness or drooping on one or both sides of the face; difficulty closing an eyelid (facial palsy)
- Inflammation of the heart (carditis) that can cause heart palpitations, irregular heartbeat, dizziness, shortness of breath, or fainting. If you are experiencing any of these heart symptoms, seek immediate medical care.
- Worsening of earlier Lyme disease symptoms

Stage 3: Late disseminated Lyme disease

Timing: Months to years after a tick bite

Common symptoms include:

- Lyme arthritis: joint pain, warmth, and swelling that may be constant or come and go. It typically occurs in one joint, usually the knee or another large joint, though it may occur in more than one.
- Concentration issues, brain fog, and memory issues
- Nerve damage that can cause tingling, numbness, burning, or stabbing in the hands and feet (peripheral neuropathy)
- Anxiety, depression, mood swings, and other neuropsychiatric issues
- Sleep disturbances such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, need for extended sleep, or unrefreshing sleep
- Worsening of earlier Lyme disease symptoms