Living in “Lyme Country”

Biomedical Lyme disease research

The goal of discovering better testing, diagnosis, and treatment of Lyme disease is a medical frontier closer to reality at the Research Institute, where scientists are using cutting-edge technology to develop new methods and tools that help simplify diagnosis and monitoring of Lyme disease.

Microbiologist Steven Rosenberg and his colleagues have already developed a method for detecting the Lyme disease infection bacteria. Using a novel technology that concentrates Lyme disease-causing bacteria in a blood sample. The Research Institute team is also developing an ultra-sensitive test to detect the DNA of Lyme disease-causing bacteria directly in the blood.

What is the Lyme Disease Registry?

Initiated largely through philanthropy, the WCHN Lyme Disease Registry is the first hospital-based Lyme disease registry in the nation to focus interdisciplinary research on the impact of Lyme disease. This landmark research project is aimed at building an increasingly robust database of information gathered from individuals diagnosed with Lyme disease on a large scale.

Through the pairing of extensive clinical data with participant blood samples and cutting-edge technology, the Lyme Disease Registry is an invaluable tool to answer some of the biggest questions of course, how people are affected, and the causes of persistent symptoms. The community-based participatory nature of our research draws on the unique strengths of varied clinicians, researchers, and patients, both within the WCHN system and throughout the nation.

Lyme Disease: New Insights, New Discoveries

The Western Connecticut Health Network (WCHN) Biomedical Research Institute has launched an innovative, multidisciplinary initiative to better understand the mysteries of Lyme disease. The initiative, called the WCHN Lyme Disease Research Program, is utilizing proprietary technology and cutting-edge research to study this poorly understood disease.

It’s estimated that nearly every year, 300,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed with Lyme disease, a disease transmitted by a virtually unnoticeable tick species that often travels on deer. As Connecticut residents we are no stranger to these tiny bacterium carrying ticks. We live in the heart of Lyme disease country with more than 22,000 residents being diagnosed with Lyme disease each year.

Keeping ticks away

Deer ticks are most active in the warmer months from April through September. However, regardless of the time of year, it’s important to take precautions to keep ticks away when outdoors—particularly if you are hiking, gardening near the woods, long grass, brush, or gardening. Here are some tips to keep you protected:

• Dress long. Wear long sleeves or t-shirts stand out into the tall grass, woods, etc.
• Apply insect repellent containing DEET (20% DEET) to clothes and exposed skin.
• Do a full-body tick-check (on yourself, children, and pets) after being outdoors.
• Ticks can attach to any part of the body but prefer body creases. Therefore, pay close attention to the ears, back of the neck, underarms, countertops, scapula, groin, and back of the knees.
• A shower and shampoo may help wash off ticks. After returning home, spin clothes in the dryer for at least 20 minutes on high heat to kill any unseen ticks. Lyme ticks can be as small as the period in this paragraph. That’s why it’s particularly important to check for ticks after being outdoors.

If you spot a tick, remove it immediately with fine-tipped tweezers. Be sure to grasp the tick close to the skin and steadily pull upward to avoid crushing the tick’s body. Thoroughly clean the bite area with soap and water after removing the tick. If you experience any symptoms (see below), call your doctor. Even if you don’t discover a tick on your skin, keep alert for any signs and symptoms of Lyme disease.

Signs and symptoms

The early symptoms of Lyme disease can be mild and easily overlooked. If bitten by one of these infected ticks, you may experience flu-like symptoms that can lead to a stiff neck, chills, fever, swollen lymph nodes, headaches, fatigue, muscle aches, and joint pain. You may also experience a larger red spot that expands over a period of days or weeks, forming a circular rash resembling a bull’s-eye. If left untreated, the bacterium travels through the bloodstream causing more serious symptoms like these:

• Arthritis—typically in the knee
• Meningitis—which causes neck stiffness and severe headaches
• Heart rhythm irregularities
• Facial paralysis
• Shooting pains, numbness, and tingling in the hands and feet

Treatment

Doctors typically prescribe antibiotics for treatment. If diagnosed in the early stages, many patients will recover after a round of oral antibiotics. However, for some people, whether diagnosed at later stages of the disease or if initially misdiagnosed, treatment approaches vary.

Killing your Joints Healthy

Many of us don’t think twice about getting out of bed to start our day. We don’t have any achy joints that prevent us from going for a long walk or a run. However, a life without joint pain is a luxury for some people. For those with damaged or diseased joints simply getting out of bed can be painful.

Wear and tear on our joints increases as we age—especially if we carry too much weight, injure ourselves, or have poor posture. The best way to care for our joints is to keep them, along with our muscles, ligaments, and bones, strong and stable.

Here are some ways to protect your joints for years to come:

Stay active

Exercise helps keep joints flexible and strong and may reduce joint swelling. It can also strengthen muscles and ligaments while keeping joints stable. Exercise should challenge you, but it shouldn’t cause lasting pain. If you’re not used to being active, you might need to start slow and increase the duration.

Bone and ligament strength

Always wear proper protective gear to help prevent injuries while at play and work. Wear and tear on joint cartilage can lead to repetitive movements, like kneeling or squatting. Serious or even minor injuries can damage cartilage and can lead to long-term joint problems. Before a workout, be sure to warm up gently with movements to get your body ready.

And don’t forget to listen to your body. Exercise should challenge you, but it shouldn’t cause lasting pain. You’re not always in control of the muscle or ligament injury. Know your limits. Certain exercises might just be too much for your joints to handle. Go slow and modify exercises that cause you discomfort.

Build strong muscles and ligaments

Strong muscles support your joints. Without enough muscle, your joints take a pounding. Weight training exercises help build muscle and keep surrounding ligaments strong. You can wear and tear on joints decrease if you exercise regularly. Our multidisciplinary team of orthopaedic experts will guide you through the joint replacement process, before, during, and after surgery. Call (888) 585-7198 for more information.

Keep your Joints Healthy

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Avoid injury and overuse
- Wear proper protective gear

Without enough muscle, your joints take a pounding. Weight training exercises help build muscle and keep surrounding ligaments strong. You can wear and tear on joints decrease if you exercise regularly.

Seek help

If you’re not getting the relief you need from joint pain, speak with your doctor. Your doctor may recommend certain treatments or over-the-counter or prescription medications to help you. Perhaps joint replacement is right for you.

Are you ready of a life without joint pain?

Should you need joint replacement, look no further than the Western Connecticut Health Network. There is no better place for joint replacement care in the state. Our multidisciplinary team of orthopedic experts will guide you through the joint replacement process, before, during, and after surgery. Call (888) 585-7198 for more information.

Health Talk Airs on Comcast Channel 23 every Thursday evening at 7:30 p.m.

The 30-minute show covers advancements in health care, health issues, and wellness topics.

Tune in the week of June 7 for the “Community Health Improvement” Health Lifestyle Initiative hosted by our community partners:

Theresa Aportesky, MPH, CHES, DPH, Health Educator, Norwalk Health Department and
Mary Ann Genuario, Health and Fitness Director, Riverbrook Regional YMCA.

Keeping Your Joints Healthy

Strong muscles support your joints. Without enough muscle, your joints take a pounding. Weight training exercises help build muscle and keep surrounding ligaments strong. You can minimize the wear and tear on joints if you exercise regularly. Your doctor may have more information.

Pain relief

Many doctors recommend physical therapy to help reduce pain and improve mobility. However, you may need to try several different approaches to find what works best for you.

Nutrition

Eating a nutritious diet can help reduce joint pain. Your doctor may recommend dietary changes to relieve joint pain. Your doctor may recommend dietary changes to relieve joint pain.