

Once bitten, twice ill

Helen Harvey achieved a medical impossibility: she got well after suffering from Lyme disease infection for 16 years after being bitten by a tick

If there is such a thing as a secret disease, Lyme disease takes the crown.

It's a bacterial infection that's caused by a tick bite while walking through long grass or wooded areas.

Most of us don't even notice we've been bitten, and just one in 10 cases is ever diagnosed. Even then, treatment—usually high-dose antibiotics—is effective only for the first month after the bite. After that, diagnosis and treatment becomes more difficult, and many other diseases get blamed for the symptoms, which include fibromyalgia, depression, IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), tinnitus (ringing in the ears), insomnia and muscle weakness.

Helen Harvey, 39, suffered all of these symptoms, and more, as the disease took hold for 16 years until it was finally diagnosed and successfully treated. This in itself is an incredible statement because, even after a few months' infection, the disease becomes increasingly difficult to treat—and yet, Helen achieved it through a combination of detox, nutrition and homeopathy.

But until she realized what the problem was, Helen lost contact with a lot of friends and family, some dismissing her as an hysteric, while doctors thought she was attention-seeking—including one specialist who told her to “pull herself together” and get back to her sports, and prescribed antidepressants and sleeping pills.

The penny dropped only when she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, a disorder that causes widespread pain and IBS. Searching the problem on websites, she read that many cases of fibromyalgia are actually Lyme disease. Looking at other websites, she saw pictures of the rash that initially appears after the tick bite—and she recognized the self-same patterns that had appeared on her skin while in Australia.

During her post-graduate travels in Western Australia, she had suddenly started to suffer a “strange flu-like illness”; she had terrible fatigue, her lymph nodes swelled

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up; there were “weird lumps all over my head”, and a strange circular rash on her feet and legs, she said.

Her symptoms didn’t improve when she returned to the UK. She started to suffer from anxiety, depression and insomnia—which continued to plague her throughout her 20s—and she began to experience severe muscle pain down her right side. The tinnitus started four years later while on holiday.

Pregnancy pains

She became pregnant a year later, after marrying Julian, but had a dreadful time during the pregnancy. She was constantly exhausted and suffered severe oedema (fluid retention) such that, by week 20, polyhydramnios (excess amniotic fluid) was diagnosed. She put on six stone (38 kg) and baby George was delivered by C-section.

Her anxiety worsened, so she was put on citalopram, an SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) antidepressant. But within 14 months of the birth of George, she was pregnant again. Because of the polyhydramnios

Leaky brain clues

Early in her Lyme infection, Helen Harvey (see main story) said that the cells in her body started to emit a strange smell, which she later identified as ammonia. This ties in with a new theory of what Lyme disease actually is, opening up new avenues of treatment.

While everyone agrees it’s a bacterial infection initiated by a tick bite, Lyme disease specialist Dr David Jernigan believes it becomes a

neurotoxic disease. The disease creates ammonia in the brain, which causes a leaky brain syndrome, he postulates.

As ammonia can alter permeability of the blood–brain barrier, it may allow large molecules to reach the brain, causing ‘cerebral allergies’, as he calls them. This would explain the many symptoms the disease generates.¹

In animal tests, the blood–brain barrier is breached within two weeks of *Borrelia* infection. The bacteria burrow down between the cells of the

brain’s outer membrane, causing localized inflammation. Proteins are then released to fight the bacterial invasion, resulting in holes in the cerebral membrane.

This is not an especially novel theory. Soon after Lyme disease was identified, scientists were characterizing it as a ‘neuropsychiatric illness’ responsible for paranoia, dementia, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, panic attacks and depression.

REFERENCES

- 1 Townsend Lett Docs, 2007; April: 141–8

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How a bite becomes a disease

Although there’s evidence that the Victorians suffered from it, Lyme disease was recognized and named only as recently as 1975, when a group of children living in the town of Lyme, in Connecticut in America, mysteriously developed severe joint pain.

The children all had unusual skin rashes, and doctors from nearby Yale University finally linked their symptoms to a tick bite after discovering bacteria (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) in the children’s blood. The doctors finally decided the children

had been bitten by the *Ixodes scapularis* tick, which mostly lives on deer.

The tick has to attach to the skin for at least 12 hours before the bacteria are transmitted into the bloodstream.

As the tick is no bigger than a pinhead, it’s unlikely to be seen, although the bull’s-eye-like rash is a tell-tale sign you’ve been bitten. The tick usually falls off after a few days, but by then the damage is done.

The rash should be visible within a few days, as it usually continues to spread—sometimes by as much as 12 in (30 cm)—and the bitten person may also suffer flu-like symptoms, including tiredness, muscle

or joint pain, headaches, fever or chills and neck stiffness.

But, as only around one in 10 cases is ever diagnosed, many people don’t know they’ve been bitten or even notice the rash.

If left untreated for more than six to eight weeks, the symptoms can become chronic and start to mimic a wide range of conditions such as skin lesions, meningitis, arthritis, multiple sclerosis and depression.

Lyme disease can be fatal in a small number of cases. The UK recorded its first fatality in 2005, when the cause of death was recorded as “liver disease due to Lyme sepsis”.

and excess weight gain, Helen’s doctor thought she had gestational diabetes and put her on metformin, an antidiabetic, and changed her antidepressant prescription to amitriptyline, a tricyclic. She topped up the cocktail with the occasional sleeping pill.

“I was totally exhausted throughout the pregnancy. I used to lie awake at night wondering how I would cope with the next day. I ached everywhere, and I was constantly in pain, stressed, exhausted and felt totally toxic,” she said. She gained six stone in weight for a second time, and gave birth prematurely—again by C-section—to Jack.

For two years Helen said that raising Jack was just one big blur as he constantly suffered from colic and reflux, and didn’t sleep or eat properly. “I was utterly exhausted and the fatigue was beyond debilitating. I remember so vividly looking around at other mums during those first few years with the two boys

How not to get bitten

Disease from tick bites is nothing new. The Victorians called it 'sheep-tick fever' but, as the name suggests, it was mainly limited to farmworkers and those who came into close contact with farm animals.

Today it's an epidemic, though nobody knows just how prevalent it is. Around 30,000 new cases in the US, and 3,000 in the UK, are identified each year, but it's also known that this is merely the tip of the iceberg, as it represents only about a tenth of the real numbers infected each year.

The Lyme disease epidemic is the result of forest mismanagement where woodland areas have been cleared for housing or parklands, and anyone who visits or lives in moorlands, or near forests and wooded areas, is susceptible. The ticks are almost certainly active where deer are also found.

In the UK, the *Ixodes scapularis* ticks that spread Lyme disease are especially prevalent in Exmoor, the New Forest, the South Downs, parts of Wiltshire and Berkshire, Thetford Forest in Norfolk, the Lake District, the Yorkshire Moors and the Scottish Highlands.

If you're in areas where the ticks might be active, always dress carefully before going for a walk. Wear long-sleeved shirts, tuck trousers into socks and wear a hat or hooded coat. At the end of the walk, check your skin for any tell-tale signs of tick activity, and get your friends to check the backs of your legs and arms, where you can't see. Always check your dog too, if it went with you on the walk. It's worth a second check a day or so later for any signs of rash, although one-third of all bites don't cause any skin problems.



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and wondering how other people got through the day without needing to lie down and rest continually. I was so depressed, in pain and very lonely. No one understood the daily torture I was enduring. I couldn't see friends for very long as I needed to rest and felt that I couldn't explain to people why, as I didn't know what was wrong with me. I would drag myself through each day and have continual anxiety about how I would cope with all the children's demands, as all I wanted to do was collapse onto the sofa every minute of the day.”

And worst of all, she still had no idea what was wrong with her. By this time, her symptoms included severe and persistent muscle aches on the right side of her body, body stiffness, constant exhaustion, tinnitus, acne on her face and body, brain fog, insomnia, bad premenstrual tension (PMT), anxiety and panic attacks, heat intolerance, metallic taste in the mouth, jaw pain, sensitive teeth and gum disease, rosacea on her right cheek, no libido, irritable bladder, chemical sensitivities, IBS symptoms like heart burn and diarrhoea,



The tick test

If you suspect you've been bitten—and you develop flu-like symptoms or joint pain after walking in an area where deer graze—there are two blood tests to help diagnose the condition.

But the ELISA and Western blot tests are not completely reliable, and the ELISA in particular can produce a false positive (seeing a problem that's not there) if you already have similar problems such as rheumatoid arthritis or glandular fever.

The tests should be done a few weeks after the suspected bite, as the infection will then have developed sufficiently for the test to 'see' antibodies to the bacteria. Even if the tests come back negative at this stage, it's always worth scheduling a second round of tests a few weeks later.

The optimal window of testing is two to six weeks after the bite—much longer than that and Lyme disease becomes more difficult to detect.

constant thrush, mouth sores, food intolerances, sinus congestion, low blood pressure (hypotension), cold feet, tingling toes, nerve pain, dry skin, dizziness and frequent viral infections.

She saw the family doctor once a month for a few minutes each time. "I would cry and say how much pain I was in and how I couldn't bear the noise in my ears, and how anxious I was and how I couldn't sleep, and they would hand out the next prescription for antidepressants and sleeping pills. I hated taking pills but couldn't see any way out."

Helpful alternatives

Helen started seeing a nutritionist who diagnosed gut problems, *Candida* and high levels of ammonia that were contributing to her tiredness. She took "bucketloads" of supplements and went on a strict anti-*Candida* diet—which helped—although the pain, tinnitus and exhaustion persisted.

She also had reflexology, kinesiology and acupuncture, all of which helped to some extent. In addition, Helen paid to see a private specialist after her own doctor failed to make any headway, saying "sometimes there are no reasons why we have these symptoms".

The specialist "tore me apart", said Helen, telling her to pull herself together, stop being a bad wife and get back to her sports.

It was around this time that things finally started to change for Helen. Jack had markedly deteriorated since having the MMR vaccine—his speech development stopped, he lost the ability to walk and he was continually ill for eight months afterwards—and a friend recommended a homeopath, Meike Lawrence, whose clinic was near their home in Ashted, Surrey.

After the first consultation, Jack had a strong reaction to the homeopathic remedy, with vomiting and bad diarrhoea for nearly two weeks. Three weeks on and he started to talk again, and the healing crisis continued after Meike gave him the second remedy. Today Jack

Do you have Lyme disease?

Leading Lyme disease expert Dr Joseph J. Burrascano, Jr has listed all of the possible symptoms of the disease. If you're a chronic sufferer from one or more of the following and there's no obvious cause, you might suspect Lyme. Having more than one symptom at the same time that tends to flare up once a month is another tell-tale sign of the disease.

- Persistent swollen glands
- Sore throat
- Fevers
- Sore soles of feet
- Joint pain
- Joint swelling
- Unexplained back pain
- Stiff joints
- Muscle pain or cramps
- Facial twitches
- Confusion, difficulty thinking
- Mood swings
- Anxiety
- Psychosis
- Tremor
- Seizures
- Headaches
- Light sensitivity
- Blurred, double vision
- Ear pain
- Buzzing, ringing in ears
- Increased motion sickness
- Dental pain
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Unexplained weight gain/loss
- Unexplained menstrual irregularity
- Loss of libido
- Heartburn
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Heart murmur
- Breathlessness
- Night sweats.

Antibiotics, and more antibiotics

Medicine has only two responses to Lyme disease: antibiotics and more antibiotics. Surprisingly, there's a major split between the approaches.

Most doctors agree that a short course of antibiotics can successfully treat the disease—provided it is diagnosed within a few months of the bite. After that, it becomes an intractable infection, one that's almost impossible to treat.

Not so, says Dr Joseph J. Burrascano, Jr, who treated more than 7,000 cases of last-

stage Lyme disease before he eventually retired.

In each case, he prescribed powerful antibiotics taken for long periods—but critics claimed his approach was unproven.

Although the therapy was successful, many patients suffered severe reactions to the antibiotics.

unpleasant and I vomited a few times". She still has a flush every month and continues to pass more stones.

Road to recovery

Four months after starting the liver flushes, Helen is back to playing tennis several times a week, with no fatigue or tiredness afterwards. She's also jogging, cycling and lifting weights in the gym, and sleeping well. "I have no chronic fatigue or pain, no stiffness, my complexion is glowing, I have lost lots of weight, no tinnitus, no dizziness, no funny smells, no weird tastes, no depression—I am happy, positive, calm and full of vitality... the difference in just over a year is incredible."

Helen also follows a daily detox plan with Epsom bath salts, and she drinks lemon water, eats organically with only small servings of meat and drinks plenty of water.

And what do her doctors make of her extraordinary turnaround? "I haven't had any significant contact with a doctor in the last year, but when I did briefly mention my progress and success with liver flushing and homeopathy, I was met with total disinterest and dismissal that such procedures could ever work."

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is a thriving four-year-old who would have been on the autistic spectrum had it not been for the homeopathy, says Helen.

Helen decided to see Meike as well, but only after she had a blood test for Lyme disease, as by this time she had started to suspect Lyme following the fibromyalgia diagnosis. The results were negative, which was not surprising after 16 years; even after several months, blood tests for Lyme disease are very inaccurate.

A holistic approach

Although her Lyme disease symptoms had "spun out of control", especially after two difficult pregnancies had lowered her immunity, Helen noticed that Meike didn't focus on the disease when she began treatment.

Instead, she was more interested in Helen's overall mental wellbeing and prepared a constitutional remedy. Helen also decided to stop the antidepressants, which she had been taking regularly for two years.

Over the next few months, old beliefs and traumas—especially the suppressed grief over her mother's death—came to the surface. "All this suppression had put a huge strain on my system and weakened my immune system to the point where it couldn't fight the infections I had acquired," said Helen.

She had constant post-nasal drip, and constant coughs and colds and other

discharges, but she also noticed that the pain, stiffness and tinnitus were easing, and her depression and anxiety were also lifting. By month five, Helen realized the tinnitus and pain had gone completely; in fact, every symptom was improving or had cleared.

Meike felt Helen's liver was weak and suggested a liver flush. She followed the Andreas Moritz protocol and had colonic irrigation before each flush. She passed around 300 stones during the first flush—the whole procedure was "very

How Helen reversed Lyme disease

Helen Harvey is something of a miracle, according to the current medical model. She endured Lyme disease infection for 16 years and suffered symptoms that made her life almost unbearable, until she reversed the condition.

Her healing began when she went to see classical homeopath Meike

Lawrence. "I remember when Helen came in to see me that she was suffering from chronic pain and chronic fatigue. In homeopathy, we don't talk in terms of chronic conditions; it's an acute problem that has never been resolved."

Unresolved feelings and experiences were at the heart of Helen's problems, and Meike quickly discovered that Helen had never properly mourned the death of her mother, who had died a year before she suffered the tick bite.

She gave Helen a remedy

that would help her relive that time and the feelings she had when her mother died. What followed was a discharge; in some cases, it's an emotional outpouring but, in Helen's case, it was a physical discharge.

Once those suppressed emotions had surfaced, Helen was able to begin her own healing process through her 'vital force', said Meike.

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