

Bad Bite: Tick Can Make You Allergic To Red Meat

BY MARILYNN MARCHIONE
AP Chief Medical Writer

A bug can turn you into a vegetarian, or at least make you swear off red meat. Doctors across the nation are seeing a surge of sudden meat allergies in people bitten by a certain kind of tick.

This bizarre problem was only discovered a few years ago but is growing as the ticks spread from the Southwest and the East to more parts of the United States. In some cases, eating a burger or a steak has landed people in the hospital with severe allergic reactions.

Few patients seem aware of the risk, and even doctors are slow to recognize it. As one allergist who has seen 200 cases on New York's Long Island said, "Why would someone think they're allergic to meat when they've been eating it their whole life?"

The culprit is the Lone Star tick, named for Texas, a state famous for meaty barbecues. The tick is now found throughout the South and the eastern half of the United States.

Researchers think some other types of ticks also might cause meat allergies; cases have been reported in Australia, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Japan and Korea.

Here's how it happens: The bugs harbor a sugar that humans don't have, called alpha-gal. The sugar is also found in red meat — beef, pork, venison, rabbit — and even some dairy products. It's usually fine when people encounter it through food that gets digested.

But a tick bite triggers an immune system response, and in that high-alert state, the body perceives the sugar the tick transmitted to the victim's bloodstream and skin as a foreign substance, and makes antibodies to it. That sets the stage for an allergic reaction the next time the person eats red meat

and encounters the sugar. It happened last summer to Louise Danzig, a 63-year-old retired nurse from Montauk on eastern Long Island.

Hours after eating a burger, "I woke up with very swollen hands that were on fire with itching," she said. As she headed downstairs, "I could feel my lips and tongue were getting swollen," and by the time she made a phone call for help, "I was losing my ability to speak and my airway was closing."

She had had recent tick bites, and a blood test confirmed the meat allergy.

"I'll never have another hamburger, I'm sure," Danzig said. "I definitely do not want to have that happen to me again."

In Mount Juliet near Nashville, Tennessee, 71-year-old Georgette Simmons went to a steakhouse on June 1 for a friend's birthday and had a steak.

"About 4:30 in the morning I woke up and my body was on fire. I was itching all over and I broke out in hives. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before," she said.

A few weeks later, for a brother's birthday, she ordered another steak. Hours later she woke "almost hysterical" with a constricted throat in addition to hives and a burning sensation. She, too, recalled tick bites.

Dr. Robert Valet at Vanderbilt University said Simmons was one of two patients he diagnosed with the meat allergy that day. He warned her it could be worse next time.

"I never did eat a lot of red meat anyway but when I go out I like a nice fillet. Right now I wouldn't even eat hamburger meat," Simmons said.

At the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, "I see two to three new cases every week," said Dr. Scott Commins, who with a colleague, Dr. Thomas Platts-

Mills, published the first paper tying the tick to the illness in 2011.

One of the first cases they saw was a bow hunter who had eaten meat all his life but landed in the emergency department several times with allergic reactions after eating meat. More cases kept turning up in people who were outdoors a lot.

"It seemed something geographical. We thought at first it might be a squirrel parasite," Commins said. "It took us a while to sort of put everything together" and finger the tick, he said.

Dr. Erin McGintee, an allergy specialist on eastern Long Island, an area with

many ticks, has seen nearly 200 cases over the last three years. At least 30 involved children, and the youngest was 4 or 5. She is keeping a database to study the illness with other researchers.

"It is bizarre," she said. "It goes against almost anything I've ever learned as an allergist," because the symptoms can occur as long as eight hours after eating meat, rather than immediately, and the culprit is a sugar — a type of carbohydrate — whereas most food allergies are caused by proteins, she said.

Allergic reactions can be treated with antihistamines to ease itching, and more se-

vere ones with epinephrine. Some people with the allergy now carry epinephrine shots in case they are stricken again.

Doctors don't know if the allergy is permanent. Some patients show signs of declining antibodies over time, although those with severe reactions are understandably reluctant to risk eating meat again. Even poultry products such as turkey sausage sometimes contain meat byproducts and can trigger the allergy.

"We don't really know yet how durable this will be" or whether it's lifelong, like a shellfish allergy, Valet said. The meat allergy "does

not seem to be lifelong, but the caveat is, additional tick bites bring it back," Commins said.

Michael Abley, who is 74 and lives in Surry, Virginia, near Williamsburg, comes from a family of cattle ranchers and grew up eating meat. He developed the meat allergy more than a decade ago, although it was only tied to the tick in more recent years.

"Normally I can eat a little bit of dairy," he said, but some ice cream landed him in an emergency room about a month ago. He admitted having had recent bug bites.

"I'm surrounded by ticks here," he said.

USDA Seeks Public Input To Increase Transparency Of SNAP Retailer Data

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking public input concerning a proposal to provide more information to the public about the amount of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits used by participants at individual grocery stores and retailers.

USDA's goal is to provide as much transparency as possible on retailer data within the limits of the law. In doing so, USDA will consider input from a wide variety of stakeholders through a Request for Information (RFI) published Aug. 4 in the Federal Register. The RFI seeks public comment on several questions related to the transparency of SNAP retailer redemption information.

"Our goal is to provide more transparency so that people can have access to basic information about the amount of SNAP benefits that individual grocery stores and retailers are redeeming," Agriculture Under Secretary Kevin Concanannon said. "We hope that this public comment period will be informative as to how we can do that in the most thoughtful and appropriate way possible."

The RFI is part of the Obama Administration's ongoing effort to make government more open and accountable and increase transparency.

Since 1978, USDA has interpreted federal law as protecting SNAP retailer redemption information.

A South Dakota newspaper successfully challenged that view and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit ultimately agreed, ruling in favor of the newspaper. The ruling was limited to the interpretation of Section 9(c) of the Food and Nutrition Act and did not address whether redemption data constitutes "trade secrets, [or] commercial or financial information obtained from a person [that

is] privileged or confidential" which would still be protected from disclosure through Exemption 4 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

USDA is now considering whether this redemption data constitutes confidential business information under FOIA. To make a determination, USDA is required to seek feedback from affected stakeholders, specifically SNAP retailers, on whether annual aggregate redemption data from individual stores is confidential under FOIA.

Additionally, the USDA is considering what, if any, adjustments should be made to SNAP regulations regarding the release of SNAP retailer transaction data in the future based on input from the public. Comments may be submitted through the Federal Register until Sept. 8.

SNAP — the nation's first line of defense against hunger — helps put food on the table for millions of low income families and individuals every month.

As the largest of USDA's 15 nutrition assistance programs, SNAP has never been more critical to the fight against hunger. SNAP is a vital supplement to the monthly food budget of more than 46 million low-income individuals. Nearly half of SNAP participants are children, nine percent are over 60 and more than 40 percent of recipients live in households with earnings.

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Dry Cleaning

Q What should we do to prepare our clothing for the changing season?

A We don't like to think about it, but summer is rapidly coming to a close. Soon the crisp fall air will be with us. Now is the perfect time to consider cleaning your summer wardrobe and prepare you fall and winter clothing for the coming season.

There will be plenty of warm weather yet, but being prepared for fall now is just one more thing you won't have to worry about later. Don't forget your winter comforters and spreads. Clean them out now and be ready for the switch when fall nights arrive.

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Jane Rhoades

Family Medicine

Q What is a concussion?

A A concussion is a brain injury caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body. What seems like a mild injury can be serious. Signs and symptoms of a concussion may include headache, dizziness, nausea, balance problems, blurry vision, light or noise sensitivity, feeling sluggish, confusion or memory problems. If you are concerned you or your child may have a concussion, it is important to seek medical care. Remember that children and teens with concussions should not participate in sports until cleared for activity and completely symptom free. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first concussion can slow recovery or increase the chances of developing long-term problems. Rest is the key after a concussion.

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Brandi Pravacek, CNP

Ear, Nose & Throat

Q Dr. Neugebauer, I think I need hearing aids, but I am unsure if my insurance will help defer my costs. How can I tell if I have coverage for hearing aids?

A That is a great question that we are asked frequently. As more and more insurance policies arise, benefits can be tricky to predict. At this time, a select number of insurance companies have hearing aid benefits. Blue Cross/Blue Shield plans, Medica, and Medicaid are just a few companies with policies including hearing aid coverage. Also, members of Farm Bureau have a benefit which makes them eligible for large discounts on their hearing aids. The best way to find out if you are eligible is to talk to your insurance representative. We would also be happy to sit down and help you research your options. Contact us at (605) 655-1220 with any questions.

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Kendra Neugebauer, Au.D. CCC-A

Podiatry

Q I'm getting pain on the inside of my ankle, and sometimes my arch and toes go numb. I once had carpal tunnel in my wrist. Is it possible to get carpal tunnel in my ankle and foot?

A The condition you are describing is known as tarsal tunnel syndrome. Tarsal tunnel syndrome occurs when there is pressure, stretching, or trauma to the main nerve that supplies the bottom of the foot. The nerve runs down the inside of the ankle, and then splits going to each side of the foot. Tarsal tunnel can develop from anything that takes up room in this compartment, such as swollen tendons from tendinitis, a varicose vein, or swelling of the surrounding muscles. Tarsal tunnel can also develop from flat feet, high arched foot, sports injuries, excessive exercise, or increased physical activities.

There are various tests that can be used to diagnose the tarsal tunnel syndrome, including MRI and nerve conduction velocity testing. However, this is one syndrome that is basically diagnosed from clinical signs and symptoms.

Treatment starts out conservatively with rest, ice, decreased activities, anti-inflammatories, physical therapy, and bracing. If conservative care is failing, and symptoms are worsening, surgical release of the nerve entrapment may be necessary.

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Terence Pedersen, D.P.M.



Christine Wiarda, D.P.M.

Funeral & Cremation

Q How do I find out what a funeral or cremation service will cost me or my family?

A Just call or go to your local Funeral homes and ask. FTC. (Federal Trade Commission) requires that all funeral homes give out their prices either in writing or over the phone. When you go to a funeral home ask for there general price list (GPL) and they will give it to you. FTC requires them to. It should contain all there prices. Or call them on the phone and they will either tell you there prices or offer to send you a general price list. You might be surprised at the differences between each funeral homes prices.

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Jim Goglin

Chiropractic

Q What can chiropractic do for my sinuses?

A A common complaint that sinus sufferers have is the congestion that develops in the frontal and maxillary sinuses. The chiropractic adjustment of the upper neck helps impact several mechanisms that help the sinus region respond. The drainage and lymph flow is enhanced. The muscle tension of the neck and head is improved. The nervous system's response to the adjustment increases activity of the immune system. Then, there are some individuals who also choose to use acupuncture for sinus related problems, and have a lot of success and improvement. For the most part, chiropractic has a very beneficial effect with sinus problems and is a very safe alternative treatment.

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Sheila Fitzgerald, DC

Fitness/Health

Q I have been walking for exercise and enjoy just doing that. Is that good enough?

A Walking is a fantastic form of exercise. A study of 13,000 people done through the Institute for Aerobics Research showed that participants who walked 30-minutes per day had a significantly lower risk of premature death than those who did not. It is important to note that the intensity of your walk can play a role in the amount of benefit you achieve. If you find your leisurely stroll doesn't increase your heart rate anymore and you're not feeling challenged by it, perhaps it's time to increase the intensity. Add some hills, change your terrain and if you're a treadmill walker be sure to get some non-belt time in also. While you are most likely getting some lower body strengthening with your workout, most will also benefit from some additional strength training as well. Ask your Avera Sacred Heart Personal Trainer to direct help set up a plan that fits your schedule and will help you meet your goals.

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Angie O'Connor
Clinical Exercise
Specialist

Pharmacy/Nutrition

Back to school means addressing the topic of food allergies for some children. As students head back to school this year, keep in mind that many more kids in America face food and other allergies that require the use of an epinephrine device. Keep in mind that parents may have to fill out more paperwork for their schools in order for the student to keep an epinephrine device in their backpack or with the school nurse. Parents may need to request a new prescription from their doctor for the the new school year for their child. Expiration dates on epinephrine devices should be check regularly along with a manual inspection of the liquid in the device. If the epinephrine device is discolored or cloudy, the injector needs to be replaced.

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Leah Rempher
Pharmacist D.