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How To Tell If Your Dog May Have Lyme Disease, According To Experts

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Most of us see our pets as family members, and that means keeping them happy and healthy is a major priority. However, the seasons can each present their own unique health challenges for our furry friends — especially for pets, like dogs, that frequently spend time outdoors. You likely know to check your fur baby (and yourself!) for ticks after an extended period outdoors, but even if you catch one, there's still the potential that the bug could be a carrier of [Lyme disease](https://www.mspca.org/angell_services/lyme-disease-in-dogs/), a bacterial infection that can lead to an autoimmune disorder that's transmitted through tick bites and can affect both people and animals. But how do you know if your [dog may have Lyme disease](https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/common-conditions/lyme-disease-in-dogs/)?

Like people, dogs who have Lyme disease can experience a wide array of symptoms — and, they may experience shown no signs of being sick at all for seven to[21 days](https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/prev/on_pets.html)after being bitten, according to the CDC. A dog with Lyme disease may also be completely asymptomatic [for months](https://www.pethealthnetwork.com/dog-health/dog-diseases-conditions-a-z/lyme-disease-dogs)following the initial tick bite. It's also incredibly common — the animal advocacy organization [MSPCA-Angell](https://www.mspca.org/angell_services/lyme-disease-in-dogs/)reported 50 to 75 percent of dogs in New England alone may test positive for Lyme disease, though they may not present with symptoms. Sadly, this tick-borne disease can be [potentially fatal](https://www.oregonlive.com/pets/index.ssf/2015/05/pet_talk_lyme_disease_can_be_l.html) for dogs, too.

In the case of canine Lyme disease, seeking out veterinary care as early into the disease as you can is best; that means understanding and recognizing the symptoms is key. These are[six signs to look out for](https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/common-conditions/lyme-disease-in-dogs/) if you suspect your dog may have Lyme disease, according to experts.

1. **Swollen Joints & Limping**

[Joint pain in dogs](https://www.petcarerx.com/article/8-ways-to-treat-dog-joint-pain/1403" \t "_blank) can be caused by many different health issues, including arthritis, hip or elbow dysplasia, or simply old age. However, if your pup does not have one of these pre-existing conditions, there is a chance that the joint pain they are experiencing could be a symptom of Lyme disease. Dr. Emi Saito, a veterinarian with [Banfield Pet Hospital](https://www.banfield.com/), tells Bustle, "Lameness is one of the most common signs of Lyme disease; your pet may limp, or have swollen and painful joints."

1. **They're Lethargic Or Seem Depressed**

Dr. Saito explains "lethargy and/or depression" are also both common signs that your dog may have Lyme disease — especially if these symptoms begin a few weeks after you suspect your pet was bit by a tick. A wide range of infections and diseases that affect dogs can cause [lethargy](http://www.awcwi.com/PetProblems/DogLethargy), so consulting with your vet can help you determine the source of your dog's change in energy levels and mood.

1. **Loss Of Appetite**

Another common symptom that Dr. Saito says typically appears in the first few weeks after a dog is infected with Lyme disease is a loss of appetite. In turn, this can lead to [rapid weight loss](https://www.dogzhealth.com/weight-loss-in-dogs/). If your dog is no longer anticipating their mealtimes and treats, this is your clue that your pup may be dealing with a serious health issue.

1. **Vomiting And Diarrhea**

PetWave reported that a sign your dog may be infected with a a tickborne disease such as Lyme is a sudden uptick in [vomiting and diarrhea](https://www.petwave.com/Dogs/Health/Lyme-Disease/Symptoms.aspx). Dogs can experience a wide range of digestive issues and [gastrointestinal disorders](https://www.hillspet.com/dog-care/healthcare/dog-gastrointestinal-and-digestive-problems), but coupled with these other symptoms, it may be a sign your pup has Lyme disease.

1. **Fever**

Since Lyme disease is a bacterial infection, Dr. Saito says one of the first signs that will appear once your dog has been infected could be a fever. The American Kennel Club ([AKC](https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/common-conditions/dog-fever-and-temperature/)) reported that even if you don't have a thermometer for your pet, red eyes, shivering, a dry nose, and warm ears may indicate your dog is running a temp.

1. **Kidney problems**

"Left untreated, Lyme disease can cause serious long-term health problems, including kidney disease and arthritis [in dogs]," says Dr. Saito. Though kidney disease is usually a sign that your dog has had the tickborne infection for a while, some dogs with Lyme disease will [not show any outward signs](https://www2.vet.cornell.edu/news/20140630/dog-beats-odds-lyme-induced-kidney-disease) until infection progresses. The [American Veterinarian](https://www.americanveterinarian.com/news/tick-exposure-and-kidney-disease-risk-in-dogs) reported a study that discovered "when *Borrelia* [aka, Lyme disease bacteria] antibodies were present," dogs had a 43 percent higher risk of having kidney disease.

"[Lyme disease treatment with antibiotics](https://www.wagsandwhiskers.com/component/content/article?id=69:my) is generally appropriate for dogs with clinical signs of disease. Although antibiotics are effective against Lyme disease, individual responses to antibiotic treatment can vary," explains Dr. Saito. "Occasionally, hospitalization, fluid therapy and arthritis or fever medications may be necessary."

Of course, before you suspect your dog has Lyme disease and you seek veterinary care, try to take [preventative measures to reduce your pet's risk](https://moderndogmagazine.com/articles/preventing-lyme-disease-pets/114919)of contracting the infection in the first place. Dr. Saito suggests to use a [vet-approved tick preventative](https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Safe-use-of-flea-and-tick-preventive-products.aspx), to check your dog daily for ticks, and to keep your backyard free of unruly grass and shrubbery so ticks are less likely to live there. Being aware of the subtle signs that may indicate your pup has Lyme disease, and receiving immediate medical care for them, is the most effective way to prevent the infection from becoming a chronic or fatal health issue.

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