



## Ticks

Ticks are usually a harmless irritation, but can carry Lyme disease. I recommend you discuss tick prevention treatments with your vet.

### What is a tick?

Ticks are Arthropods (animals with jointed legs). As they have four pairs of jointed legs, they belong to the Class Arachnida. This class includes spiders, scorpions, king crabs, and mites. Ticks are large mites. Mites are to be found almost everywhere. The vast majority are quite harmless; living on decomposing matter in the soil or leaf litter. A few, however, are blood-sucking parasites of mammals (deer are often hosts) and birds. These parasitic forms can spread disease as a result of their feeding activities. The parasitic ticks lurk on grass and other vegetation (they are particularly fond of bracken), waiting for a host animal to brush against it. They are attracted to the host possibly by heat or carbon dioxide.

Once on the host, the tick may move around, finding a warm, moist place to attach. Then it will begin to feed, using its mouth parts to penetrate the skin. As they feed over several days, they swell or engorge with blood taken from the host.

The structure used to penetrate the skin is the hypostome; it has backward pointing projections on it that make the removal of the tick from the skin difficult. The tick may also produce a glue-like substance, which holds it in place whilst feeding. The glue dissolves away when feeding is complete, and the tick will drop off and fall to the ground with no 'harm' being done. However, some ticks carry bacteria (in their stomach) that cause disease. They can cause illness such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever (in the States), Tularaemia, Q- fever, and Lyme Disease. It is the latter which is a particular problem in the U.K. The Health Protection Agency estimates that between 1000 and 2000 cases of Lyme disease occur each year.

### Removing a tick

As mentioned above, the tick feeds by pressing its mouth parts through the skin. In removing the tick, it is important to **remove all of it** and not leave the head or mouth parts embedded in the skin.

Do NOT attempt to remove the tick by using a hot / burning match or chemicals as these may cause it to regurgitate its stomach contents into the wound, increasing the risk of bacterial infection.

Method 1: Get hold of the tick with a pair of fine tipped tweezers as close to the skin as possible. Take care not to pull so hard that the animal is torn apart. Pull firmly but slowly until it releases its grip, do not jerk or twist as this may leave mouth parts embedded in the body or cause the tick to regurgitate diseased fluids into the bite.

Method 2: Using a tick removal tool, select the size appropriate to the size of the tick. Approach the tick from the side until it is gripped securely. Lift the tool gently and twist until the tick detaches itself. This may take 2-3 turns.

Method 3: If you have no tools at all do not delay removing the tick. Take a loop of cotton thread, tie it around the tick's mouth parts and pull gently upwards.

After removal, place the tick in some paper, squash it and dispose of it down the toilet or dispose of it in a dustbin. Disinfect the site, apply antiseptic cream and finally wash your hands.

If the tick is torn apart and the head remains in the skin, do not dig around in the skin to remove the remainder of the tick, as this can increase the risk of skin infections. It is best to let nature take its course as your pet will expel the tick out naturally by itself. Watch out for signs of fever, muscular aches and pains, loss of concentration, and general malaise or fatigue after you have removed the tick. If these signs occur, visit the vet **immediately**.