Dear Alice,

A problem with the diagnosis of Lyme disease is that the available serological tests are not too reliable. However, a new test known as LIPS with VOVO has been shown to have a reliability of 99% and can distinguish between a new infection and an older one.

Is this new test available now? If so where? If not when?

Cordially,

Once bitten twice shy

Answer

Dear Once bitten twice shy,

You are correct that the VOVO LIPS method for detecting Lyme disease appears to be the best yet. Based on research completed at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and reported in 2010, it seems to have the potential for outperforming other methods. However, it remains unclear when this test will become commercially available in the U.S. For one thing, the findings of the NIH researchers still require further validation in other labs; there are also concerns about the potential cost of the new test.

LIPS stands for luciferase immunoprecipitation system and it is a method that has been used to diagnose a variety of infections. The method uses a synthetic protein called VOVO to detect Lyme disease. So far, it has been shown to be very sensitive, detecting the disease 94 to 100 percent of the time. Apart from its potential utility as a diagnostic tool, the LIPS technology may also be useful as a means of measuring response to treatment for Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is caused by the Borrelia burgdorferi bacteria, which is transmitted via an infected tick bite. The first symptom is generally a circular red or pink rash that appears at the site of the bite. It is approximated that 80 percent of people infected with Lyme will have had this rash (known as “erythema migrans”) during their illness. Other symptoms may include fatigue, chills, headache, fever, sore muscles, and sometimes sore joints (often the knee). Usually, Lyme
disease can be successfully treated with antibiotics, particularly the most common forms of Lyme, which are “early localized” and “early disseminated” disease.

Current recommended laboratory diagnostic tests for Lyme disease have several limitations including low sensitivity during the early stages of infection, high cost, and inability to distinguish between active and prior infection.

If you have been bitten by a tick or have a rash which you think could be from Lyme, be sure to visit your health care provider.

Take (not tick) care,

Alice!

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