



When Gayle Ditzler felt so sick she could barely move, she vowed that if she ever started feeling better, she would devote her time to telling others about the silent dangers of Lyme disease. Although not completely symptom-free, Gayle has made a remarkable comeback and tells others how she is combatting the illness.

Lyme Disease Almost Destroys Gayle's Life

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Lancaster Farming Staff
WERNERSVILLE (Berks Co.)
— When Gayle Ditzler turned 29 years old, she looked the picture of health. She had been healthy her entire life. Then suddenly she began to experience phantom pains that grew progressively worse in almost every part of her body.

More and more, she found herself sitting in the doctor's office. She had her gall bladder removed, bursitis in the arm, hair loss, lower rib pain, and all her lymph nodes hurt. She experienced blurred vision, equilibrium imbalances, mood swings, sleep disturbances. . . . The doctor ordered almost every test heard of — including EKG and blood tests — all of which came back showing no sign of illness.

"I could barely function," Gayle said. "My family doctor finally said, 'Over the years I've seen a lot of people like you and they didn't end up in good places.'"

Gayle was crushed. "I knew what he was referring to. He thought I was crazy," Gayle said.

Although her husband was supportive, he, too, was becoming frustrated by the seeming inconsistency of Gayle's complaints versus tests that did not show any medical basis for them.

"The pain became so severe I wanted to kill myself," Gayle said. "Every muscle hurt, then my joints began to hurt. I couldn't see or

think straight."

Gayle could no longer drive a car. She could barely dress and feed her daughter, now six years old, before collapsing on the sofa.

Gayle was convinced she wasn't crazy. She suspected that she had Lyme disease, which is transmitted by the bite of the Ixodes dammini tick. But when Gayle finally convinced the doctor to test for Lyme disease, the test results were negative.

Gayle's case is not an unusual scenario for those with Lyme disease, which is the fastest growing epidemic in the U.S. Tests results are often negative. Because symptoms vary greatly, it is difficult for doctors to diagnose.

Eventually Gayle heard of a New Jersey doctor who specializes in Lyme disease. Dr. Praful Shaks of Elmwood Park, N.J., did more extensive testing, which showed that Gayle had Lyme disease. According to Shaks, Lyme disease is difficult to diagnose for the following reasons:

- More than half of Lyme disease victims do not remember being bitten by a tick (a tick bite does not hurt because of the anesthetic the tick injects upon both puncturing and withdrawing).
- More than 60 percent of victims do not exhibit a telltale rash.
- The time lapse between the tick bite and emergence of symptoms can be weeks to months because of the spirochete's slow replication and ability to lie dor-

can lead to chronic infection.

Gayle has been on oral antibiotics for one year, after being fed antibiotics intravenously. Her blood is tested every other month and shows improvement. She takes a multivitamin and 2000 units of vitamin C daily. She drinks acidophilus milk.

Gayle is feeling amazingly better, although she said she still has some pain in her head and sometimes feels temporarily disoriented. "It feels like a lyme fog in which the head feels like it's stuffed with cotton," she said.

"But my doctor promises that I will get completely better. The pain in my joints and muscles and throughout my body is gone, so that gives me hope that symptoms in my head will also be gone," she said.

"I always said that if I ever start feeling better, I'm going to educate others about Lyme disease," Gayle said. She has been speaking to some groups, recently at the Berks County Extension Spring Awareness Day.

If left untreated, Lyme disease affects the central nervous system.

Lyme disease bacteria is likened to a thief that disguises itself and changes chemical form. It's a tricky disease in which the bacteria reproduces itself every 11-14 days.

Some doctors believe that a person affected with Lyme disease can improve with treatment but will never be totally free from symptoms. Dr. Shaks disagrees.

"He promises me that I will feel better," Gayle said.

The Ditzlers have a lovely home in a heavily wooded area in Trexler Mountain in Berks County. Formerly Gayle loved working in the yard and watching the deer nearby. But since her exposure to Lyme disease, Gayle admits that she is paranoid about the outdoors.

She will go on the deck, swim in the pool, and walk on the macadam driveway, but not on the grass. A path through the woods leads to a neighboring home. Gayle no longer allows her daughter to take the path to see her friend, because she fears exposure to the ticks from deer in the area.

Deer ticks can be a carrier of Lyme disease. The deer tick is only about the size of a pinhead when fully grown and is difficult to detect on the body. The wood tick, which is twice as large as a deer tick, has white marks near the head, and is unlikely to transmit Lyme disease.

For more information about Lyme disease, write to the following sources:

- Lyme Disease Foundation, 1 Financial Plaza, 18th Floor, Hartford, CT 06103.
- National Center for Infectious Diseases, Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Disease, Atlanta, GA 30333.
- Lyme Disease Education, Dept. of Entomology, Penn State University, 501 Agricultural Sciences and Industries Bldg., University Park, PA 16802.

Dairy Royalty Needed

WILLIAMSPORT (Lycoming Co.) — Melanie Harris, the reigning Lycoming County Dairy Princess, writes that during the past year, she has had the opportunity to work with hundreds of children and teach them about the dairy industry. She has worked with radio stations, talked to many groups and organizations, participated in parades, and attended fairs because of the dairy princess program.

Dairy Princess contestants must be between the ages of 16 and 24. She urges youth in Lycoming County to participate in promotion and she or a parent be involved in the dairy industry. She must also be single and never had a child. A FFA or 4-H dairy project also qualifies.

Dairy Maid candidates will assist the dairy princess throughout the year. They must have a relative involved in the dairy industry

or be involved through a FFA or 4-H dairy project.

Call Wanda Derr at (717) 323-4949 or Becky Kirkner at (717) 546-3329 for more information,



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