

JOINT MANIFESTATIONS OF LYME BORRELIOSIS

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ABSTRACT

Musculoskeletal involvement is a common feature of Lyme Borreliosis. Migratory pain in muscle, joints, or entheses occur early in the illness. Weeks to months later, untreated patients may begin to have intermittent or chronic mono- or oligoarticular arthritis, primarily affecting the knee. Only a small percentage of these patients develop chronic joint involvement. In patients with acrodermatitis chronica atrophicans, distinctive signs of joint and bone involvement can be found beneath the skin lesions.

KEY WORDS

Lyme Borreliosis, arthritis, joint and bone involvement

INTRODUCTION

Lyme arthritis (LA) was first described in North America by Steere et al. in 1976 as a previously unrecognized rheumatic disorder (1,2). Soon it turned out that LA was only one expression of a multisystem inflammatory disease (3), the dermatological and neurological manifestations of which had been described as separate entities in Europe in the early 1900s (4-6). Thus, it was believed for a long time that arthritis was a special American feature of Lyme Borreliosis (LB). In the meantime, reports on LA from nearly all European countries (reviewed in ref. 7) have confirmed previous lines of reasoning that the presumed continental difference regarding arthritis merely reflected the lack of awareness of LA in Europe (8).

INCIDENCE OF JOINT MANIFESTATIONS

In a study of 55 patients in North America who had not received antibiotics for relief of erythema migrans (EM), ten patients (18%) experienced arthralgias and 28 patients (62%) developed true arthritis with its onset as long as two years after suffering from EM (9). However, only one out of 16 patients in Sweden developed arthritis after spontaneous healing of EM (10); the follow-up period for this study was not reported. Moreover, by the time that EM and neurological manifestations of LB come to be treated more readily with antibiotics, such cases of „classic LA“ with preceding extra-articular manifestations will be increasingly rare.

