Can Lyme disease trigger sarcoidosis?

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Now, a recent case study from the Netherlands indicates that Borrelia burgdorferi may, in some instances, be one of those infectious agents capable of triggering sarcoidosis.

“This case suggests that an infection with B. burgdorferi, the causal agent of Lyme disease, could act as a trigger for sarcoidosis,” writes van Dee and colleagues in “Systemic Sarcoidosis Associated with Exposure to Borrelia burgdorferi in a 21-Year-Old Man.” [2]

Patient with sarcoidosis.

The authors describe the case of a 21-year-old forestry worker who was diagnosed with systemic sarcoidosis which impacted his lungs, kidneys and skin. The man’s diagnosis was confirmed by finding non-caseating granulomas in the lymph node and skin biopsies.

The patient was admitted to the emergency room at a Netherlands hospital with a history of recent headaches, a droopy left eyelid and swelling and redness of both legs. Other symptoms included “a stinging pain behind his sternum, fatigue, weight loss, loss of appetite, thirst and nycturia,” explains van Dee.

Lyme disease tests were ordered based on the man’s profession as a forestry worker and exposure to ticks, along with his symptoms.

A spinal tap confirmed the 21-year-old had Lyme disease. He was treated with a combination of high-dose prednisolone and antibiotics. He also received 2 weeks of intravenous ceftriaxone followed by 4 weeks of oral doxycycline.

“The patient recovered quickly within a few days of starting a high-dose prednisolone regime, and was discharged free of symptoms and in good health,” writes van Dee.

This case highlights the need for further research on the association between Borrelia burgdorferi and sarcoidosis.

As the authors point out, clinicians “should maintain a high index of suspicion for underlying infectious processes like neuroborreliosis in patients with new-onset sarcoidosis before starting immunosuppressive regimens.”
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