

INSECT REPELLENTS (Dec 2013)

Now in late January, spring will soon be with us and insect and tick bites will start. A previous article described the tick born Borreliosis or Lyme disease, but there are other, less common tick born disease eg Mediterranean spotted fever which occur in western Europe. Although eminently treatable if diagnosed early, this group of diseases is potentially serious so it is best to protect yourself if you visit areas where there are likely to be deer or sheep ticks, which is most of the areas we walk in.

Using information from an article on tick bite prevention in the British Medical Journal, December 2013 the following insect repellents appear to be the best.

EUCALYPTUS OIL

Gives a high level of protection lasting for several hours and can be reapplied as often as you wish. Pleasant aroma. Problem - not always easy to find but usually available on Amazon. Prices vary greatly, best to shop around. Do not confuse the insect repellent with the same oil used for massage and aroma therapy. I do not know but the latter may not be as effective

DEET

A 30% solution is best. Used by the British Army for jungle training. Very effective. Rumours of toxicity are probably without foundation, if used sensibly. Protects for several hours. Problem-stings if there is the slightest graze, and doesn't smell too good either.

PERMETHRIN (PERMETRINA IN SPAIN)

Although not recommended for application to skin, it is safe to do so. However, it's main use is probably applied to clothing. In malaria areas, hanging permethrin impregnated curtains over windows and doors has been shown to reduce the incidence of malaria by 50%

Ticks sometimes crawl under clothing to areas where we don't treat the skin, so spraying clothing is worth considering. It is said not to stain and can last for 20 washes before needing retreatment.

I spray my dogs with permethrin and although we find occasional ticks, they are usually not attached to skin and appear dead or dying.

REMEMBER THAT KEEPING SKIN COVERED IS ALSO A GOOD WAY OF PROTECTING AGAINST TICK AND MOSQUITO BITES

Dr. Geoff