



TIPS

for Preventing Encephalitis

Encephalitis is inflammation and swelling of the brain, which leads to changes in neurologic function, mental confusion, and seizures. Viruses are the leading cause of encephalitis, which can develop after an infection caused by disease-carrying agents (eg, mosquitoes and ticks). Bacteria may be another cause of encephalitis. The following tips can help you prevent encephalitis.

Make hygiene a priority. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water. Particularly wash your hands after using the restroom, and before and after meals.

Get vaccinated. Because vaccines are an important part of preventing encephalitis, keep your immunizations up to date. Vaccines for viruses such as mumps, measles, rubella, and chicken pox have lowered the rate of encephalitis from these diseases.

Strengthen your immune system. People who have HIV or AIDS, take immune-suppressing drugs, or have another condition causing a weakened immune system are at increased risk of encephalitis. Consuming a healthy diet will keep your immune system healthy. Antioxidant foods that may improve your overall health include fruits (eg, tomatoes, cherries, and blueberries) and vegetables (eg, bell peppers and squash).

Protect your home. Avoid mosquito and tick exposure. For example, eliminate standing water in your yard, because mosquitoes can lay their eggs there. Common problem areas include flowerpots or other gardening containers, flat roofs, old tires, and clogged gutters.

Notice viral disease. There may be visible signs of viral disease outside. If you notice sick or dying birds or animals, report your observations to your local health department. Also, never handle a dead bird with your bare hands.

Cover up. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants if you are outside between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active. Wear protective clothing when you are in wooded areas with tall grasses and shrubs, where ticks are common.

Use repellent. Products containing DEET can be directly applied onto the skin, whereas compounds containing permethrin have acaricidal and repellent effects and should be used on clothing and camping gear. If you are using sunscreen and a repellent, apply sunscreen first.

Avoid transmission. Never share tableware or beverages. Also, be sure to teach children to avoid sharing utensils at home and in school.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.