

**Here are this week's health care news highlights from AskaPatient:**

- Nearly half of Americans with heart disease struggle with medical bills, and one in five cannot pay at all. <http://ow.ly/Z6Cf30nJsVC> (02-18-19)
- Testing pushup capacity could be a free and faster alternative to stress tests for gauging cardiovascular risk. <http://ow.ly/XRsm30nJsYm> (02-18-19)
- Experimental Crohn's disease treatment uses a patient's own cells to reset their immune system. <http://ow.ly/6vXJ30nJt2T> (02-18-19)
- Interval training burns more calories in a shorter amount of time than continuous exercise like jogging. <http://ow.ly/KaXA30nKpCz> (02-19-19)
- Measuring biomarkers with this new blood test could help doctors assess severity of pain in an objective manner. <http://ow.ly/IFK930nKpKX> (02-19-19)
- Heavy smokers now have their eyesight to worry about in addition to their heart and lungs, researchers find. <http://ow.ly/lw1Z30nKpNQ> (02-19-19)
- People who take a common type of acid reflux medicine have a higher risk of kidney disease. <http://ow.ly/8mLT30nLhyl> (02-20-19)
- Poor sleep is linked to higher levels of inflammatory cells which can lead to plaque buildup in blood vessels. <http://ow.ly/ME0k30nLhIK> (02-20-19)
- Chemists develop light-based production of molecules that could make drug discovery cheaper. <http://ow.ly/cCbd30nLHbe> (02-20-19)
- Salt may play a major role in allergic reactions and provide an ideal skin environment for bacteria that thrive in salty conditions. <http://ow.ly/UeVu30nM6Gd> (02-21-19)
- New rapid test for sepsis could save lives by cutting result times from days to minutes. <http://ow.ly/ApbL30nM6JP> (02-21-19)
- Some companies are promoting blood infusions from young donors as an unproven treatment for various conditions, FDA. <http://ow.ly/FajU30nM6Ts> (02-21-19)
- Urine test could detect organ rejection much earlier and without the use of needle biopsies. <http://ow.ly/MV3230nN5WX> (02-22-19)
- Exposure to a common plastics and cosmetics chemical during pregnancy is linked to motor deficits in children. <http://ow.ly/eEWJ30nN62a> (02-22-19)
- U.S. ranks highest among wealthy countries in drug overdose deaths for the past decade, and the gap is widening. <http://ow.ly/TBYS30nN69a> (02-22-19)
- An unexpected discovery may change the way rheumatoid arthritis is treated. <http://ow.ly/AycM30nOdl0> (02-23-19)
- Eating garlic and onions may lower risk of colorectal cancer. <http://ow.ly/HCsG30nN6bR> (02-23-19)

**Allergy News: New research suggests that odds are even greater that a tick bite can trigger allergies to hamburgers, steak, pork, and other red meat**

A paper presented at this weekend's American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) annual conference in San Francisco sheds new light on a strange food allergy that is brought on by a tick bite. "Alpha gal" is a sugar found in the blood of most mammals, but not in humans or other primates. Since the mid-2000s, it has been known that Lone Star tick bites can trigger an allergic immune response in humans to this sugar. The assumption has been that ticks needed to feed on a non-primate mammal before biting a human to trigger the

allergic response in humans. But a recent University of North Carolina study, led by Dr. Scott Commins, suggests that tick bites may trigger the "alpha gal" meat allergy through their saliva **even if they have not recently fed on a mammal**. Researchers suggest that the allergy trigger could be inherent in the saliva of the tick itself, not in the mammal's blood that they consume. This means that the potential tick population capable of transmitting the allergen is much greater than was thought previously, making more people at risk.

Unlike other food allergies, which appear within minutes of eating, the allergic reaction triggered by eating beef or pork will not occur until three to six hours after eating. This has sometimes made it a difficult condition to diagnose, although doctors are becoming more aware of this unusual allergy. Ticks most likely to transmit the allergy tend to live in the southeast region of the United States and certain areas of New York, New Jersey and New England. Still fairly rare, the condition affects more people each year, with at least 5,000 cases documented in the southeast. For now, treatment for "alpha gal syndrome" is simple: not eating beef or pork. Patients must avoid eating all red meat, and some patients must also avoid eating gelatin or taking animal-derived biological drugs such as the cancer drug called cetuximab. Research has suggested that some gelatin-containing vaccines, such as the zoster (shingles) vaccine, can also trigger serious allergic reactions in patients with alpha gal syndrome.

#### Trivia question:

#### Is the tick the only animal that can trigger an allergy to a food?

"Apparently again, the Lone Star tick is not so lone. Commins cites a fascinating example: There's a [report from Japan](#) of surfers who are getting bites from jellyfish and then becoming allergic to a traditional food (fermented soybeans or natto)." (from *Allergic Living*, cited below)

#### Sources and More Reading

Press release: [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2019-02/uonc-lot022219.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-02/uonc-lot022219.php)

"Red Meat Allergy: Incidence on Rise, Therapy in Works" (Question and answer with Dr. Scott Commins):

[www.allergicliving.com/2016/07/19/red-meat-allergy-incidence-rise-therapy-works/](http://www.allergicliving.com/2016/07/19/red-meat-allergy-incidence-rise-therapy-works/)

From the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Programs and Abstracts of Papers to be Presented During Scientific Sessions: 2019 AAAAI Annual Meeting on Saturday, February 23, 2019: Red Meat Allergy May Develop Independent of Tick Blood Meal Status

[https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749\(18\)31849-9/abstract](https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749(18)31849-9/abstract)

Another paper presented this weekend presents a theory about why there are few cases of alpha gal in Texas and the gulf coast. A consistent "shortage" of cases of the alpha-gal syndrome (AS) on the Gulf coast: possible relevance of fire ants as a predator of lone star ticks: [https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749\(18\)32592-2/fulltext](https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749(18)32592-2/fulltext)

Anaphylaxis after zoster vaccine: Implicating alpha-gal allergy as a possible mechanism (May 2017)

[https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749\(16\)31455-5/abstract](https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749(16)31455-5/abstract)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) article on allergy to a sugar in red meat. In the U.S., juvenile Lone Star ticks, sometimes called seed ticks, are blamed for transmitting the majority of alpha gal allergies. In other countries, however, where the condition has also been documented, other kinds of ticks are responsible. <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/news-events/niaid-scientists-link-cases-unexplained-anaphylaxis-red-meat-allergy>

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