

By Joan F. Wright

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## LIVING WELL: Keeping mosquitoes at bay this summer

As we enter the summer months, our attention and interests turn to the outdoors where we hope - weather permitting - to spend a majority of our time.

But are concerns over sun exposure, ticks and mosquito-borne viruses sucking all the fun out of being outdoors?

First, let's address the Zika virus. As of now, the only risk for getting Zika is with people travelling to places with ongoing Zika virus outbreaks or engaging in sexual activity with someone who has traveled to these places. There have been no such outbreaks in the U.S. although with warm weather coming, experts predict there may be some spread in Florida, Texas and other southern states.

With that said, we should take safety measures against mosquitoes for the other problems they carry. Of course, avoidance is the best prevention, but tell that to the poor soul who is a magnet for mosquitoes through no fault of their own. My late father was one such magnet and with all due respect, we'd suggest he stand in one corner of the yard while we were in another section so as to protect us from the mosquitoes. Despite his great sense of humor, he didn't find this terribly funny.

Unfortunately, some people just produce certain chemicals that attract the nasty bugs. Lactic acid is one such chemical, and some evidence shows a link to type O blood having a higher attractiveness. But perhaps the most important is one's metabolic rate – the amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) the body releases while it burns energy. It's the CO<sub>2</sub> that mosquitoes use to identify good biting targets. While we can moderate metabolic rate through diet and exercise, there's really only so much you can do to change the rate significantly enough to ward off the bugs' attraction.

This may, however, be a good indicator as to why overweight or obese people, as well as pregnant women, may also be more attractive to mosquitoes as they all tend to have higher resting metabolic rates. Physical exertion and drinking alcohol also raise one's metabolic rate. So be aware that enjoying a nice cold frosty one outdoors after mowing the lawn or gardening may set you up as the perfect target for the annoying bugs!

Since mosquitoes rely on secondary cues (movement, changes in colors) to differentiate people from trees, cars and other CO<sub>2</sub> emitting objects, wear light colored clothing to help you blend in to the environment. Motion (waving arms, moving around) also attracts them, so repellents may be a good protection.

The best ways to use repellent are:

- Apply to face with your hands and avoid eyes and mouth;
- Apply only to exposed skin or clothing – never under clothing;
- Use just enough to cover you – heavy doses aren't more effective;
- Wash hands after application and at the end of the day, wash treated skin with soap and water.

There are plenty of repellents out there - from high powered chemicals to home-made concoctions. What works for some, may not work for others, perhaps again due to one's own chemical make-up. But to narrow the choices a bit, it's perhaps wise to take a look at Consumer Reports (CR) test of 16 repellents. The report is free to the public due to the international public health concern. (Visit [consumerreports.org/insect-repellents](http://consumerreports.org/insect-repellents)).

Note which products have a broad-stroke defense across many pests and problems, including deer ticks, West Nile disease and other mosquito illnesses. Consumer Reports makes recommendations of a few and suggests avoiding products made with natural plant oils, which tested poorly for lasting protection, if any. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that people should use products registered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which regulates and evaluates the products for safety and effectiveness. You can find the EPA Reg. number on the back of the repellent's label.

*Living Well is a monthly column provided by Joan F. Wright on behalf of the NVNA & Hospice. Wright is a Certified Dementia Practitioner with NVNA and Hospice, a non-profit home healthcare and hospice agency serving over 25 communities on the South Shore from Milton to Plymouth. For information call 781-659-2342 or visit [www.nvna.org](http://www.nvna.org).*

