

# Mosquitoes are picky about their appetite

August 28 2009, By Gail Appleson

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A female mosquito of the Culicidae family (*Culiseta longiareolata*). Image: Wikipedia

It's a late summer afternoon and you're out on the patio having a glass of wine with friends. As the sun begins to set, you start to think about what's for dinner.

Surprise! It's you.

That's right. You've suddenly become irresistible to a female mosquito who wants to join the party by sipping your blood. Why are you -- rather than your pals -- so much more pleasing to her palate?

"There's no definitive answer. We really don't know," said Joe Conlon, the Jacksonville, Fla.-based technical adviser to the American Mosquito

Control Association. "There's a tremendous amount of research going on as to why some people are more attractive to mosquitoes than others. But we've only begun to scratch the surface."

While researchers can't pinpoint why mosquitoes choose one human entree over another, they do know these [blood](#) sucking insects are influenced by what they see and smell.

Unfortunately, mosquitoes can target you from more than 100 feet away. And if they find you yummy, your kids will probably be tasty treats as well.

"A lot of it is heredity," said Dr. Ken Haller, associate professor of pediatrics at St. Louis University. "When parents bring their kids in, I ask the parents if they get bitten by mosquitoes."

He said research shows that genetics account for 85 percent of a person's susceptibility to being bitten.

Among other things researchers know is that mosquitoes are attracted to the [carbon dioxide](#) that humans exhale. The more carbon dioxide you put out, the more they like you. That might explain part of the reason why adults tend to get bitten more often than children, Conlon said.

They've also found that mosquitoes enjoy lactic acid and cholesterol on the skin.

"Mosquitoes are also attracted to disgusting smells," said Conlon. "They like Limburger cheese, dirty socks and smelly feet, but try telling a teenager that."

In addition to smell, movement is a mosquito magnet.

"Fidgety people get bitten more," Conlon said.

If all things are equal, the active person will probably get bitten first, agreed Haller. For example, if there are twins and one is playing volleyball and the other is resting in a hammock, the volleyball player will most likely be bitten.

So if you're doing anything athletic and breathing heavily, you're especially attractive to mosquitoes because of the amount of carbon dioxide and lactic acid you're emitting. [Mosquitoes](#) also like the chemicals in perspiration and the increased humidity it creates around your body. And of course there's the movement.

If you do get stung, Haller said, he's found a unique treatment for those itchy swellings: antiperspirants, particularly roll-on and push-up gels rather than sticks. Plain deodorants won't work.

"The aluminum salts in the antiperspirant help the body to reabsorb the fluid in the bug bite," he said. "The swelling goes down and the itching goes away."

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