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# PRECAUTIONS FOR HANDLING AND PROCESSING DEER

**IMPORTANT:** CWD was first detected in North Carolina in 2022. For an updated list of affected counties visit [ncwildlife.org/cwd](http://ncwildlife.org/cwd).

**While this fact sheet focuses on concerns and questions regarding Chronic Wasting Disease,** the field dressing and processing precautions listed should be followed when handling any wild game and will minimize risks of transmission of other disease or foodborne illness.

Chronic wasting disease, or CWD, is a fatal disease that impacts deer, elk, moose, and reindeer. The source of the disease is an abnormal prion (a form of protein). These prions concentrate in locations such as the brain, spinal cord, tongue, eyes, and in the lymph nodes and spleen. According to the Centers for Disease Control, to date there have been no reported cases of CWD infection in people. While there is no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans, some animal studies suggest CWD poses a risk to certain types of non-human primates. Since 1997, the World Health Organization has recommended that it is important to keep the agents of all known prion diseases from entering the human food chain.

## General Precautions

- Do not eat any parts from a deer that appears sick.
- Do not eat the eyes, brain, tongue, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils or lymph nodes of any deer.
- If hunting in an area where CWD has been confirmed, have your harvested animal tested for CWD and avoid consuming meat from any animal testing positive.

## Field Dressing & Home Processing

- Wear rubber or latex gloves at all times.
- Use only knives or utensils selected for the purpose of field dressing and processing.
- Minimize contact with the brain, spinal cord, spleen and lymph nodes as you work.
- Remove all internal organs when field dressing.
- Do not cut through the spinal column except to remove the head. Use a knife designated only for this purpose and ensure that it is disinfected after use.
- Bone out the meat and remove all fat and connective tissue. This will also remove lymph nodes.
- All damaged meat near and around the wound channel should be removed and discarded. If using lead ammo, fragments can travel up to 18 inches depending on bullet type. These fragments can be a potential health problem for pregnant woman and children.
- Dispose of the brain and spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils, bones, and head as instructed by the State you are



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hunting in. For disposing deer harvested in North Carolina, please read the Disposal of Deer Harvested in North Carolina, found on [ncwildlife.org/deerdiseases](http://ncwildlife.org/deerdiseases) under Related Links.

- Process each deer separately, then store each deer's meat in its own labeled containers.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitize equipment and work areas with a 50/50 solution of bleach and water after processing, allowing equipment to soak for 5 minutes.



## Eating Venison

Never eat meat from a deer that looks sick.

Never eat a deer's:

- Brain
- Tongue
- Tonsils
- Eyes
- Spinal cord
- Spleen
- Lymph nodes

To be sure you've removed all of the parts listed above:

- Gut the deer
- Remove the head
- Cut meat from the bone with a knife; don't cut through bones
- Remove all fat, membranes and tendons from the meat

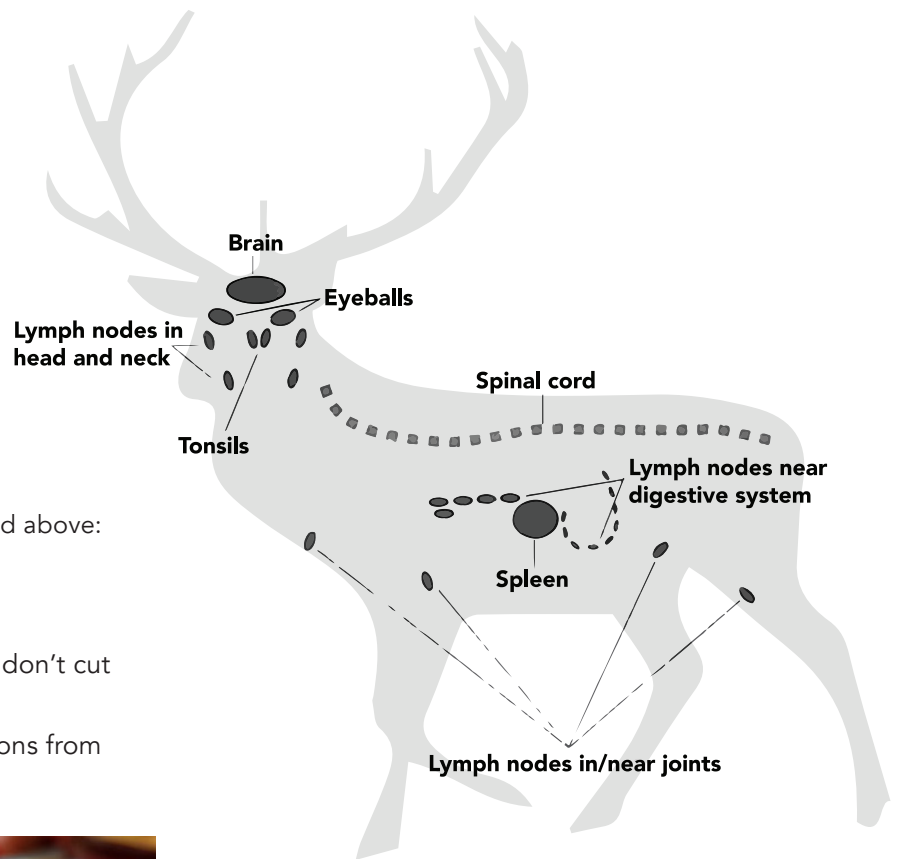


ILLUSTRATION BY THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



IRINA DOBROHOTOVA/123RF

You can easily find the brain, tongue, eyeballs and spinal cord. The spleen is an internal organ in the animal's midsection. Lymph nodes are lumps or knobs of tissue. Some are next to internal organs. Others are embedded in fat and membranes attached to muscles.

You don't need to know exactly where the spleen and lymph nodes are, because normal field dressing coupled with boning out a carcass will remove most (if not all) of these body parts. Cutting away all fatty tissue will remove remaining lymph nodes. Some main locations of lymph nodes are shown in the diagram above.

While cooking venison, be sure the meat is cooked thoroughly. The meat should be cooked to at least 165 degrees. Although cooking will not destroy the CWD causing agent, it will reduce the risk of common foodborne illnesses.