

STATEMENT

Christine Freund

Selbsthilfegruppe Zeckenopfer

Advice and Help for Tick Victims

The Self-Help Group for Tick Victims was founded in 1986, at a time when the Austrian population had not yet been sufficiently vaccinated against TBE (Tick-Borne Encephalitis, or FSME in German). As a result, the number of infections continued to increase (300 cases of illness). Those affected by the *viral* disease TBE or the *bacterial* infection borreliosis were able to turn to our association. Ever since, the Self-Help Group for Tick Victims has been supporting this subset of people with help and advice, with those closest to them also being integrated into the care provided.

After a hospital stay for a case of TBE, most patients do not feel healthy by any means. Having overcome an illness of the central nervous system, many patients continue to suffer from the after-effects of the disease, such as difficulties in concentrating, reduced functional capability, depressive mood, and psychological defects. Every year, a number of TBE patients are left with lasting impairments, such as paralyses.

Besides promoting contact and discussion among the group members themselves and giving advisory assistance by telephone, the Self-Help Group will, in well-justified cases, arrange examinations and physical therapies and support patients and their families in dealing with governmental agencies.

TBE is a disease that is 99% avoidable! For this reason it is important that those affected pass along their experiences to the general public so as to make the dangerousness of this disease clearly visible.

Many of our most severely impaired members would gladly be able to turn back the wheel of time and have themselves vaccinated retroactively. So, the clear message from those affected by TBE to those not yet vaccinated is: "Protect yourself against TBE."