What is Sepsis?

Sepsis is the body’s overwhelming and life-threatening response to infection which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

Sepsis can occur even after a minor infection.

Sepsis is difficult to diagnose and treat.

Sepsis is dangerous and can be DEADLY.

Over 1 million cases of sepsis occur each year and up to half of the people who get sepsis will die.

What can you do to PREVENT sepsis?

1. Get vaccinated against the flu, pneumonia, and any other infections that could lead to sepsis. Talk to your doctor for more information.

2. Prevent infections that can lead to sepsis by:
   - Cleaning scrapes and wounds
   - Practicing good hygiene (e.g., hand washing, bathing regularly)

3. If you have an infection, look for signs like: fever, chills, rapid breathing and heart rate, rash, confusion, and disorientation.

What should you do if you think you have sepsis?

Seek medical treatment if you have signs of sepsis following an infection.

www.cdc.gov/sepsis
SEPSIS FACT SHEET
A POTENTIALLY DEADLY OUTCOME FROM AN INFECTION

What is sepsis?
Sepsis is the body’s overwhelming and life-threatening response to an infection which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

When can you get sepsis?
Sepsis can occur to anyone, at any time, from any type of infection, and can affect any part of the body. It can occur even after a minor infection.

What causes sepsis?
Any type of infection that is anywhere in your body can cause sepsis, including infections of the skin, lungs (such as pneumonia), urinary tract, abdomen (such as appendicitis), or other part of the body. An infection occurs when germs enter a person’s body and multiply, causing illness and organ and tissue damage.

Who gets sepsis?
Anyone can get sepsis as a bad outcome from an infection, but the risk is higher in:
- people with weakened immune systems
- babies and very young children
- elderly people
- people with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, AIDS, cancer, and kidney or liver disease
- people suffering from a severe burn or wound

Ask your doctor about your risk for getting sepsis.

What are the symptoms of sepsis?
There is no single sign or symptom of sepsis. It is, rather, a combination of symptoms. Since sepsis is the result of an infection, symptoms can include infection signs (diarrhea, vomiting, sore throat, etc.), as well as ANY of the symptoms below:

- Shivering, fever, or very cold
- Extreme pain or general discomfort (“worst ever”)
- Pale or discolored skin
- Sleepy, difficult to wake up, confused
- “I feel like I might die”
- Short of breath
Why should I be concerned about sepsis?
Sepsis can be deadly. It kills more than 258,000 Americans each year and leaves thousands of survivors with life-changing after effects. According to CDC, there are over 1 million cases of sepsis each year, and it is the ninth leading cause of disease-related deaths.

How is sepsis diagnosed?
Doctors diagnose sepsis using a number of physical findings like fever, increased heart rate, and increased breathing rate. They also do lab tests that check for signs of infection.

Many of the symptoms of sepsis, such as fever and difficulty breathing, are the same as in other conditions, making sepsis hard to diagnose in its early stages.

How is sepsis treated?
People with sepsis are usually treated in the hospital. Doctors try to treat the infection, keep the vital organs working, and prevent a drop in blood pressure.

Doctors treat sepsis with antibiotics as soon as possible. Many patients receive oxygen and intravenous (IV) fluids to maintain normal blood oxygen levels and blood pressure.

Other types of treatment, such as assisting breathing with a machine or kidney dialysis, may be necessary. Sometimes surgery is required to remove tissue damaged by the infection.

Are there any long-term effects of sepsis?
Many people who have sepsis recover completely and their lives return to normal. But some people may experience permanent organ damage. For example, in someone who already has kidney problems, sepsis can lead to kidney failure that requires lifelong dialysis.

How can I prevent sepsis?
1. Get vaccinated
2. Prevent infections that can lead to sepsis by:
   - Cleaning scrapes and wound
   - Practicing good hygiene (e.g., hand washing, bathing regularly)
3. If you have an infection, look for signs like: fever, chills, rapid breathing and heart rate, rash, confusion, and disorientation.

Where can I get more information?
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—CDC works 24/7 protecting America’s health, safety and security. Whether diseases start at home or abroad, are curable or preventable, chronic or acute, stem from human error or deliberate attack, CDC is committed to responding to America’s most pressing health challenges. cdc.gov/sepsis cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections
- Rory Staunton Foundation—The Rory Staunton Foundation supports education and outreach efforts aimed at rapid diagnosis and treatment of sepsis, particularly in children. rorystaunton.com
- Sepsis Alliance—Created to raise sepsis awareness among both the general public and healthcare professionals. Sepsis Alliance offers information on a variety of sepsis-related topics. Visit sepsis.org/library to view the complete series of titles. sepsis.org

This fact sheet was developed in collaboration with CDC, Sepsis Alliance and the Rory Staunton Foundation.
LIFE AFTER SEPSIS
FACT SHEET
WHAT SEPSIS SURVIVORS NEED TO KNOW

ABOUT SEPSIS
What is sepsis?
Sepsis is the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to an infection which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

What causes sepsis?
Any type of infection that is anywhere in your body can cause sepsis, including infections of the skin, lungs (such as pneumonia), urinary tract, abdomen (such as appendicitis), or other part of the body. An infection occurs when germs enter a person's body and multiply, causing illness and organ and tissue damage.

What are the different types of sepsis?
Many doctors view sepsis as a three-stage syndrome:

- **SEPSIS** causes fever, rapid heart rate/breathing, and an increased white blood cell count. If you have an infection, even a minor sign or symptom can indicate sepsis, and you should seek medical treatment immediately.

- **SEVERE SEPSIS** is when there are also signs and symptoms which indicate an organ may be failing. Immediate hospital treatment is required.

- **SEPTIC SHOCK** is when you have severe sepsis, plus extremely low blood pressure that doesn't respond to fluid replacement. Immediate hospital treatment is required.

LIFE AFTER SEPSIS
What are the first steps in recovery?
After you have had sepsis, rehabilitation usually starts in the hospital by slowly helping you to move around and look after yourself: bathing, sitting up, standing, walking, taking yourself to the restroom, etc. The purpose of rehabilitation is to restore you back to your previous level of health or as close to it as possible. Begin your rehabilitation by building up your activities slowly, and rest when you are tired.

How will I feel when I get home?
You have been seriously ill, and your body and mind need time to get better. You may experience the following physical symptoms upon returning home:

- General to extreme weakness and fatigue
- Breathlessness
- General body pains or aches
- Difficulty moving around
- Difficulty sleeping
- Weight loss, lack of appetite, food not tasting normal
- Dry and itchy skin that may peel
- Brittle nails
- Hair loss

There are more than 1.4 MILLION sepsis survivors every year in the United States.

Many survivors are left with LIFE-CHANGING challenges.
It is also not unusual to have the following feelings once you’re at home:

- Unsure of yourself
- Not caring about your appearance
- Wanting to be alone, avoiding friends and family
- Flashbacks, bad memories
- Confusing reality (e.g., not sure what is real and what isn’t)
- Feeling anxious, more worried than usual
- Poor concentration
- Depressed, angry, unmotivated
- Frustration at not being able to do everyday tasks

**What can I do to help myself recover at home?**

- Set small, achievable goals for yourself each week, such as taking a bath, dressing yourself, or walking up the stairs
- Rest and rebuild your strength
- Talk about what you are feeling to family and friends
- Record your thoughts, struggles, and milestones in a journal
- Learn about sepsis to understand what happened
- Ask your family to fill in any gaps you may have in your memory about what happened to you
- Eat a balanced diet
- Exercise if you feel up to it
- Make a list of questions to ask your doctor when you go for a check up

**Are there any long-term effects of sepsis?**

Many people who survive sepsis recover completely and their lives return to normal. However, older people, people who have suffered more severe sepsis and those treated in an intensive care unit are at greatest risk of long-term problems, including suffering from post-sepsis syndrome.

**What is post-sepsis syndrome?**

Post-sepsis syndrome is the term used to describe the group of long-term problems that some people with severe sepsis experience. These problems may not become apparent for several weeks (post-sepsis), and may include such long-term consequences as

- Insomnia, difficulty getting to or staying asleep
- Nightmares, vivid hallucinations, panic attacks
- Disabling muscle and joint pains
- Decreased mental (cognitive) functioning
- Loss of self-esteem and self-belief
- Organ dysfunction (kidney failure, respiratory problems, etc.)
- Amputations (loss of limb(s))

**What’s normal and when should I be concerned?**

Generally, the problems described in this fact sheet do improve with time. They are a normal response to what you have been through.

Some hospitals have follow-up clinics or staff to help patients and families once they have been discharged. Find out if yours does or if there are local resources available to help you while you get better.

However, if you feel that you are not getting better, or finding it difficult to cope, or continue to be exhausted call your doctor.

**Where can I get more information?**

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—CDC works 24/7 protecting America’s health, safety and security. Whether diseases start at home or abroad, are curable or preventable, chronic or acute, stem from human error or deliberate attack, CDC is committed to responding to America’s most pressing health challenges. [cdc.gov/sepsis](http://cdc.gov/sepsis) [cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections](http://cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections)

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