

Patient Information

Sepsis



What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a rare but serious complication of an infection. It is an inflammatory response to an infection which can cause severe damage to the body's tissues and organs. This can become life threatening if not recognised and treated in a timely manner.

Early symptoms may include:

- high temperature (fever) or low body temperature
- chills and shivering
- a fast heartbeat
- fast breathing

Some symptoms that may indicate sepsis or septic shock:

- feeling dizzy or faint
- a change in mental state, such as confusion
- nausea and vomiting
- slurred speech
- severe muscle pain
- severe breathlessness
- less urine production than normal, for example, not urinating for a day
- feeling cold, clammy, and pale or mottled skin
- loss of consciousness

What causes the symptoms of sepsis?

Usually, your immune system keeps an infection limited to one place. This is known as a localised infection.

Your body produces white blood cells, which travel to the site of the infection to destroy the germs causing infection.

A series of biological processes occur, such as tissue swelling, which helps fight the infection and prevents it spreading. This process is known as inflammation.

If your immune system is weak or an infection is particularly severe, it can quickly spread through the blood into other parts of the body. This causes the immune system to go into overdrive, and the inflammation affects the entire body.

This can cause more problems than the initial infection, as widespread inflammation damages tissue and interferes with blood flow.

The interruption in blood flow leads to a dangerous drop in blood pressure, which stops oxygen reaching your organs and tissues.

How is sepsis treated?

Almost all people with sepsis and septic shock require admission to hospital. Some people may require admission to an intensive care unit (ICU).

Due to problems with vital organs, people with sepsis are likely to be very ill. However, sepsis is treatable if it is identified and treated quickly, and in most cases leads to a full recovery with no lasting problems.

Treatment usually involves three treatments and three tests, known as the “**sepsis six**”:

1. Giving antibiotics intravenously (into the vein).
2. Giving fluids intravenously.
3. Giving oxygen if levels are low.
4. Taking blood cultures - to identify the type of bacteria causing the infection.
5. Taking blood samples - to assess the severity of the sepsis.
6. Monitor urine output - to assess how well the kidneys are functioning.

Rehabilitation and recovery from sepsis

Rehabilitation is implementing certain things to help people get better after sepsis. This will include activities of daily living to help people look after themselves, such as moving around, washing and toileting. To achieve this, patients will work with physiotherapists.

What may happen when people get home after having sepsis?

- People may feel very tired and need to sleep more than usual. The body requires rest to recover.
- People may have lost weight and muscle tone, therefore may feel weak. Supplementary nutritional drinks can help put weight back on. These can be obtained from your GP, chemist or supermarket.
- Nails and teeth may be more brittle. Skin may feel dry and peel, regular application of moisturiser may help with this.
- Hair may feel thinner and some may fall out, but it will usually grow back again.
- People may find their appetite is less. It can help to start with small meals and healthy snacks then build up slowly.
- It can be frustrating for people going home and finding tasks that were once easy are now difficult. It is important to remember how poorly they once were and the progression they are now making.

Some people experience the following feelings after being treated for sepsis:

- Depression/anxiety.
- Not wanting to socialise.
- More agitated than usual.
- Have nightmares/bad memories.
- Confusion about what happened.

What might help?

- Talking to friends and family about feelings.
- Writing down what they remember about their time in hospital and asking family/friends to fill in any gaps that are missing.
- Find out more about sepsis via The UK Sepsis Trust (UKST). Contact details are on the back cover of this leaflet.
- If things are not improving over time, they should visit their GP for advice.

What to do if you think you may have sepsis:

Sepsis is a medical emergency.

Seek medical advice urgently from NHS 111 if you have possible early signs of sepsis as mentioned.

If sepsis is suspected, you'll usually be referred to hospital for further tests and treatment.

If you think you or someone in your care has any of the mentioned symptoms of sepsis, go straight to your nearest A&E or call 999.



Useful contact details

If you have any questions, or concerns about information you have read in this leaflet, please contact our **sepsis nurses**:

Sepsis nurses:

☎ 01438 288483

NHS 111

Dial 111

Further information

NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk

The UK Sepsis Trust (UKST) - www.sepsistrust.org
or telephone 0800 389 6255

NICE National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence - www.nice.org.uk

References

Information in this leaflet has been adapted from the Sepsis Trust, with permission.

Photography: East and North Hertfordshire Trust Clinical Photography Department

www.enhertr.nhs.uk



You can request this
information in a different
format or another language.

Date of publication: July 2017

Author: Rebecca Hemmings, Anne Hunt and Gina Creasey

Reference: Version: 01

Review Date: July 2020

© East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust