

## What is Sepsis?

Sepsis is a serious illness caused by the body's extreme response to an infection. Without timely treatment, sepsis can rapidly lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and even death. Anyone can get an infection and any infection can lead to sepsis, but certain people are at higher risk. The risk is higher in people who:

- Are older or bedridden
- Have catheters or IVs in their body
  - Catheters are flexible tubes inserted into the body to help remove fluids, most commonly urine
  - IV stands for **intravenous** and is a device that is inserted into your vein to help deliver fluids or medications
- Have a weakened immune system
- Have HIV/AIDs
- Have liver or kidney disease
- Have cancer
- Do not have a spleen
- Are staying in the hospital or have had recent surgery

## How does sepsis develop?

Sepsis happens when an infection you already have triggers a chain reaction throughout your body. Common infections are:

- Pneumonia, which is an infection in your lungs
- UTI or urinary tract infection, which is an infection of your kidneys or bladder

- Cellulitis, which is an infection in your skin
- Colitis, which is an infection of your intestines

Sepsis needs to be treated quickly. If not treated quickly, it can lead to septic shock, which is life-threatening. Sepsis shock happens when an infection starts to damage other organs in the body leading to low blood pressure.

### What are the signs and symptoms of sepsis?



**CONFUSION OR  
DISORIENTATION**



**SHORTNESS OF BREATH**



**HIGH HEART RATE**



**FEVER, OR SHIVERING,  
OR FEELING VERY COLD**



**EXTREME PAIN OR  
DISCOMFORT**



**CLAMMY OR  
SWEATY SKIN**

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- Acting confused, feeling light-headed or disoriented
- Breathing faster than usual or feeling short of breath
- Heart rate faster than usual
- A fever or abnormally low body temperature, chills, or shivering
- Extreme pain or discomfort
- Cool clammy skin or red flushed skin
- Poor appetite
- Low blood pressure

- Urinating less than usual
- Other problems with heart, kidneys, or brain

### **Will I need tests to diagnose sepsis?**

Yes, your medical team will order some tests to look for an infection, to see if the infection has spread to your blood, and to see how serious your condition is. These tests can include:

- Blood tests to check how your organs are functioning
- Urine and blood cultures to look for bacteria causing the infection
- Lumbar puncture (also called “spinal tap”) to check the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord for infection. For this test, your healthcare provider inserts a hollow needle into the space near the spine in the lower back and uses it to take out a sample of the fluid.
- X-rays or other imaging tests to look for other signs of infection
- Other lab tests – For example, if you are coughing up mucus, your doctor can test your mucus for bacteria

### **How is sepsis treated?**

Sepsis and septic shock are usually treated in the hospital with:

- Antibiotics given directly into your blood stream through an IV
- Fluids through an IV
- Other medicines to treat your condition – For example, if your blood pressure is too low, you can be given medicine to raise it

If an IV or catheter in your body is causing your sepsis, your medical team might take the IV or catheter out.

Some people are also treated with surgery. For example, if you have a severe infection of the skin or tissue under the skin, your doctor may consider surgery to remove the infected areas.

Sepsis is a medical emergency. The sooner the treatment is started, the faster you will recover, and the smaller the chance for major complications or death.

## Is it possible to prevent sepsis?

You can help prevent sepsis by:

- Getting evaluated right away if you have an infection that is not getting better or is getting worse
- Seeking treatment immediately if you develop signs of organ damage (for example, confusion, dizziness, decreased urination)
- Avoiding infections -
  - Get the vaccines your doctor recommends. Vaccines can prevent serious or deadly infections. If you have a child, make sure he or she gets the recommended vaccines, too.
  - Practice good hygiene such as handwashing and keeping cuts clean and covered until healed.

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