

# Sepsis Patient information



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This information leaflet provides you with more information about sepsis. This may answer many of your queries, but please feel free to ask healthcare staff if you have any questions.

## What is Sepsis?

Sepsis is the body's overwhelming response to infection which can lead to tissue damage. Infections are common and many people recover from them without many complications. However, any infection, even a mild one, can turn into sepsis. Sepsis can be potentially life threatening and diagnosing it quickly and providing management is essential. Sepsis can happen as a result of any type of infection but is seen commonly in bacterial infection such as chest infections or pneumonia, meningitis or brain infection, and urinary tract infections.

## Who is at risk of getting sepsis?

Anyone can develop infection which may develop into sepsis, but some population groups are at particular risk of sepsis

- Children and young adults
- Pregnant people and people who have given birth recently
- Older people, especially people over the age of 75
- People with diabetes
- People who are diagnosed with conditions affecting their immune system strength or might be on some kind of medications that may lower their immune system functionality.

## How does sepsis start and what causes it?

Sepsis starts with an illness relating to a particular infection and has various symptoms depending on type and source of infection.

Generally, sepsis can give following symptoms: Feeling hot or cold, feeling shivery, feeling generally unwell and very tired, dizziness, confused, pale blotchy or blue skin, poor appetite, nausea or vomiting, rapid heartbeat, fast or shallow breathing.

Sepsis can give specific symptoms depending on source of infection, such as difficulty breathing, chest pain, cough, fever, urinary symptoms, rash that doesn't go away when you roll a glass over it, bad headache, area of red hot skin, swollen wound, tummy pain, painful joints.

**It is very important to seek early help either from your GP or 999, if you have above symptoms or if you feel unwell. Timely management saves lives.**

## How is sepsis managed?

Severe sepsis is an emergency condition and this is managed in a hospital setting and mainly requires timely administration of fluids through a vein, administering antibiotics (ideally within the first hour), giving oxygen and monitoring closely. It may involve admission to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), use of a ventilator (breathing machine), surgery to remove areas of infection.

If not managed early enough, sepsis can worsen and cause septic shock and body organs may shut down.

Sepsis can cause organ damage and may require organ support in such cases which maybe short term, long term or over a lifetime.

## Recovery from sepsis

Recovery from sepsis is different for each individual. Most patients make a full recovery from sepsis but it may take time. Sometimes, support in the form of medications or interventions may be required to help the body recover from sepsis. These will be discussed with you by your medical team if there is any need. You may feel some physical or emotional symptoms for days, months or years after recovery.

Long term effects are referred to as post sepsis syndrome and can include:

- Feeling tired and lethargic, with difficulty sleeping
- Lack of appetite
- Getting ill more often
- Changes in mood, including anxiety or depression
- Flashbacks
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

These symptoms usually get better by themselves over time. There can be symptoms of difficulty exercising or breathing, difficulty remembering things or concentrating or even feeling confused. Giving yourself time, gentle exercise, seeking support, making changes to working hours or work environment, trying to eat little but often helps with recovery. Please seek help if you have any persisting trouble or concerns.

## How to prevent from sepsis in future?

- ✓ Keep up to date with all your vaccinations
- ✓ Keep wounds or cuts clean
- ✓ Follow advice when taking any antibiotics even if you start to feel better (complete the course)
- ✓ Wash hands regularly
- ✓ Seek medical help if you have any symptoms as previously mentioned or if you are concerned
- ✓ DO NOT ignore signs and symptoms of possible sepsis and seek early help. Timely management saves lives

## Get Support:

- Speak to your GP or healthcare professional if you need any advice or if you are concerned
- Friends and family can also help in many things as helping with household chores or providing a listening ear
- Visit NHS UK website and find answers for many of your queries
- Visit Sepsis Trust UK for support

## References:

NHS England <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/easy-read-information-sepsis/>  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sepsis/treatment-and-recovery/>

Sepsis UK trust, Sepsis: A guide for patients and relatives <https://sepsistrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/updatedNew-Book>

## Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

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The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

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