

Infection Control

Sepsis: A Guide for Patients and Relatives

What is Sepsis?

Sepsis is the body's reaction to an infection which causes damage to the tissues and the organs, such as the kidneys, to fail. It has previously been known as septicemia or blood poisoning.

Sepsis can be caused by any type of infection in the body, such as a chest infection which causes pneumonia, a urine infection, an infected cut or bite, an infection in a cannula, or a wound following surgery. In some people, Sepsis can be quite mild where antibiotics given into the vein are the only required treatment, although in others, it can become more severe requiring advanced treatment in an Intensive Care Unit.

Why did I get Sepsis?

Everybody is at risk of developing Sepsis however some people are more at risk than others. Those more at risk include;

- Those who are having or who have recently had treatment for cancer;
- Are diabetic;
- Are pregnant or have just given birth;
- Have recently had an operation;
- Take long-term steroids;
- Have a wound, cut or bite;
- Are very young or very old;
- Are immunosuppressed for any other reason (the body has difficulty fighting an infection).

What does Sepsis do to your body?

Initially, you may have felt like you were developing flu like illness. You may also have had some or all of the following symptoms;

- Felt very cold and shivery;
- Felt very hot and looked flushed;
- A high temperature;
- Aching muscles;
- Felt very tired;
- Sickness and diarrhoea;
- Low appetite;
- Seemed confused, drunk or had slurred speech.

What is the treatment for Sepsis?

The main treatment for Sepsis, no matter how severe, is antibiotics given into the vein. Ideally, these must be given within the first hour of diagnosis. Other treatments include



Patient Information

fluids given via a drip if Sepsis has made your blood pressure become unusually low. You may also be given oxygen if Sepsis is making it difficult for you to get oxygen into your blood. You will also have had blood taken to determine which type of antibiotics would be best for the infection that you have and to determine if your organs have begun to fail. Medical staff will also keep a close eye on how much urine you are passing, which may mean that a catheter may have been inserted into your bladder in order to do this.

How might I feel after Sepsis?

Following Sepsis, some patients may develop Post-Sepsis Syndrome. This is a collection of symptoms that can occur for up to two years following their illness. The severity of their illness and the length of time spent in hospital can affect this.

Symptoms include the following physical, emotional and psychological feelings:

- Extreme tiredness;
- Muscle weakness and poor mobility;
- Breathlessness;
- Anxiety, depression and insomnia;
- Poor concentration;
- Hair loss;
- Repeated infections;
- Swollen limbs and joints.

Sepsis Support Group

Sepsis Support groups are held across the country for those who have had a personal experience with and/or know of a friend or family member who has experienced Sepsis.

For further details about a support group in your area please contact the UK Sepsis Trust:

Tel: 0800 389 6255

Email: info@sepsistrust.org

Web: <https://sepsistrust.org/get-support/my-local-group/>

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 5132 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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Document History

Author	Nicola Shoebridge, Sarah Bailey
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Contact Tel No	25132
Published	September 2017
Review	November 2020
Reviewed	November 2018
Version	2
Reference No	HIC/LFT/2176/17