



Sepsis *and* Prevention

Sometimes called blood poisoning, sepsis is the body's potentially deadly response to infection or injury. Sepsis and septic shock can result from an infection anywhere in the body, such as pneumonia, influenza, or urinary tract infections. Worldwide, one-third of people who develop sepsis die. Many who do survive are left with life-changing effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic pain and fatigue, and organ dysfunction and/or amputations.

Sepsis can be caused by any type of infection: bacterial, viral, fungal, or parasitic. Many infections can be prevented simply by good, consistent hygiene. Others can be prevented through vaccinations.

Not all infections can be prevented so not all cases of sepsis can be prevented. But by following these basic rules, you can decrease your risk.

VACCINATIONS

Viral infections, such as the flu, chicken pox, and HIV, are caused by viruses, microscopic organisms that must live inside a living host. Viruses generally don't survive for long outside the host.

Usually when you have a viral illness, your body produces antibodies that keep you from getting the illness again – they make you immune.

Vaccines have been developed for many viruses, such as chicken pox (varicella), tetanus, and polio. These vaccines trick your body into thinking that it has been infected with the virus – and makes you immune to the illness.

CARING FOR INFECTIONS

Every break or opening in your skin can allow germs that could cause an infection to enter your body. For this reason, it's vital that all wounds be cleaned as quickly as possible and be kept clean. They should also be monitored for signs of an infection.

Cleaning Open Wounds

- Always wash your hands before touching an open wound. If possible, wear clean disposable gloves.
- If the wound is deep, gaping, or has jagged edges and can't be closed easily, it may need stitches. See your healthcare provider as soon as possible.
- If the wound doesn't seem to need stitches, rinse it and the surrounding area with clean (not soapy) water. Gently running water over the wound can help remove dirt or debris that may be inside. If you believe there is still debris in the wound, this should be checked by a healthcare provider.

- If desired, apply an antibiotic cream or ointment.
- Cover the wound to protect it from dirt if necessary.
- Watch for signs of infection: redness around the wound, skin around the wound warm to touch, increased pain, and/or discharge from the wound. Consult your physician or nurse practitioner if you suspect you may have an infection.

Blisters

If you have a blister, do not pop it or break it. The blister is a protective barrier and breaking it introduces an opening in your skin. If the blister does break, keep the area clean and monitor for signs of infection.

TREATING INFECTIONS

If you have been diagnosed with a bacterial infection, you will likely be prescribed antibiotics for treatment. Antibiotics kill bacteria or stop them from reproducing.

Some antibiotics work against several types of bacteria, while others are for specific bacteria only. Partly because of overuse and misuse of these medications, some bacteria are becoming resistant to certain antibiotics, making it harder to treat infections. For this reason, it is essential that people take antibiotics only when necessary and exactly as prescribed.

What to do when you are prescribed antibiotics:

Follow the instructions regarding how the medication should be taken, such as with or without food, or before or after meals.

- Take it on time (ex: once a day, every six hours)

- Finish the full course (7 days, 10 days, etc.), even if you feel better. The symptoms will disappear before the bacteria have been eliminated.
- Store as directed to preserve its strength.

What not to do with antibiotics:

- Don't ask for a prescription for an infection not caused by bacteria. Antibiotics do not work on illnesses not caused by bacteria.
- Do not take someone else's antibiotics, even if you do have a bacterial infection. It may not be the correct type or dosage, or it may have expired.

Viral Infections

Most viral infections run their course without treatment, but some may be treated with anti-viral medications. If you are ill and don't seem to be getting better, or you are getting worse, developing new symptoms, or having difficulty breathing, or you are concerned, consult your healthcare professional. Medications may be prescribed for the symptoms caused by the virus.

Fungal and Parasitic Infections

Infections caused by fungi or parasites must be treated with specific medications that will eliminate the cause.

HAND WASHING

Washing our hands is a simple task we do every day, several times a day. For hand washing to be effective, it needs to be done properly.

To wash your hands, use running water to help wash the debris from your hands, lather your hands well making sure to rub between each finger and under your nails, and dry your hands thoroughly with a clean towel.

If you are using a hand sanitizer, use the same motions as when using soap and water. Your hands should be dry before touching anything. Hand sanitizers are good for when hands are not visibly dirty, but you know they need to be cleaned.



SEPSIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

IF YOU SUSPECT SEPSIS, CALL 9-1-1 OR GO TO A HOSPITAL RIGHT AWAY.

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.

What are the signs and symptoms of sepsis?

Sepsis is a toxic response to an infection. There is no single sign or symptom of sepsis. It is, rather, a combination of symptoms.

Symptoms can include ANY of the following:

- S** – Shivering, fever, or very cold
- E** – Extreme pain or general discomfort (“worst ever”)
- P** – Pale or discolored skin
- S** – Sleepy, difficult to rouse, confused
- I** – “I feel like I might die”
- S** – Short of breath

What should I do if I think a loved one or I have sepsis?

If you suspect sepsis, call 9-1-1 or go to a hospital and tell your medical professional, “I AM CONCERNED ABOUT SEPSIS.”

To learn more about sepsis,
or to read tributes and survivor stories,
visit us online at Sepsis.org



SEPSIS ALLIANCE

Suspect Sepsis. Save Lives.™

Sepsis Information Guides are supported in part by an educational grant from bioMérieux, Inc.

The information in this pamphlet is intended for educational purposes only. Sepsis Alliance does not represent or guarantee that this information is applicable to any specific patient's care or treatment. The educational content here does not constitute medical advice from a physician and is not to be used as a substitute for treatment or advice from a practicing physician or other healthcare provider. Sepsis Alliance recommends users consult their physician or healthcare provider regarding any questions about whether the information in this pamphlet might apply to their individual treatment or care.