

SEPSIS AND HOME CARE

WHAT IS SEPSIS?

Sepsis is the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to an infection. Sepsis can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

Sepsis develops as your body tries to fight an infection. The infection could be caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, or even parasites. Any infection, from pneumonia to an infected paper cut or bug bite could cause sepsis. Like strokes or heart attacks, sepsis is a medical emergency that requires rapid diagnosis and treatment.

Severe sepsis occurs when sepsis progresses to organ dysfunction, such as kidney failure or respiratory distress. This is the stage before septic shock. Septic shock develops when the blood pressure drops to dangerously low levels.



UP TO 80% OF SEPSIS CASES START IN THE COMMUNITY

Infections can happen anywhere, even at home. If you are receiving home care, you already have a health condition or you are recovering from one. This puts you at extra risk of developing an infection, which could lead to sepsis. Conditions that put you at risk for infections at home include:

- Being very young or very old
- Recovering from childbirth, surgery, or invasive procedures
- Chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or COPD
- Weakened immune system
- Chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- Immobility
- Malnutrition
- Incontinence (bladder and/or bowel)
- Pneumonia or influenza

You may also be at risk if you have a urinary catheter, an intravenous (IV), or a port – any opening in the skin or device that enters your body.

INFECTION PREVENTION AT HOME

Reducing infection risk at home may be easier than in a hospital, given there are fewer people who can cause cross-contamination. All visitors must wash their hands thoroughly when entering the home and again before touching the person who is ill or compromised. Anyone who is sick should wait to visit until they are healthy again.

Other infection and sepsis prevention tips include:

- Wash your hands before touching wounds and use disposable gloves.
- Dressing changes must be done in a clean environment.
- If the person is incontinent, frequent brief changes and skin care is essential. Report signs of redness or skin breakdown in the genital area.
- If the person is immobile, repositioning on a regular basis is essential to prevent sores. Do regular skin checks.
- Encourage good nutrition.
- Ask about appropriate vaccinations, like those for the flu and pneumonia.
- Exercise or move as much as possible.
- Take all medications, including antibiotics, as prescribed for the length of time prescribed.
- Don't share personal items, like towels, razors, toothbrushes – anything that could spread germs.

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IF YOU ARE RECOVERING FROM SEPSIS

If you are at home after being hospitalized with sepsis, you may need home care. Many people who have sepsis have a full recovery. However, post-sepsis syndrome (PSS) is a problem for others.

The term PSS describes a group of health issues that affect some severe sepsis or septic shock survivors. Problems might not be obvious until several weeks after discharge and may include:

- Insomnia and nightmares
- Disabling muscle, joint pain
- Decreased mental (cognitive) functioning
- Loss of self-esteem
- Organ dysfunction
- Fatigue

Most often, the problems listed here do resolve over time but they may be long-term or permanent. Ask your facility or doctor's office if there are follow-up clinics, staff, or local resources available to help you.

If you are not improving or you are finding it difficult to cope, ask your home health nurse or health care provider for help.

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

When it comes to sepsis, remember **IT'S ABOUT TIME™**. Watch for:

- T** **Temperature:** Higher or lower than normal
- I** **Infection:** May have signs and symptoms of an infection
- M** **Mental Decline:** Confused, sleepy, difficult to rouse
- E** **Extremely Ill:** Severe pain, discomfort, shortness of breath

Watch for a combination of these symptoms. If you suspect sepsis, see a doctor urgently, CALL 911 or go to a hospital and say, **“I AM CONCERNED ABOUT SEPSIS.”**

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SEPSIS, VISIT SEPSIS.ORG.

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