

Sepsis

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about what sepsis is. It will explain the signs and symptoms of sepsis, treatment of sepsis and information about what Brighton and Sussex University Trust is doing locally to manage sepsis.

If you have any further questions, please speak to the nurse, doctor or paramedic caring for you.

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a rare but serious reaction to an infection. If you get an infection, your body's immune system responds by trying to fight it. Sepsis is when this immune system response becomes overactive and starts to cause damage to the body itself.

This can become life threatening if not recognised and treated quickly.

It can be hard to tell if you have sepsis. You might not even have a fever or high temperature; you may just feel very unwell. Sepsis can occur following chest or water infections, problems in the abdomen like burst ulcers, or simple skin injuries like cuts and bites.

Sepsis needs to be treated urgently because it can quickly get worse and lead to septic shock. Septic shock is very serious, as it can cause organ failure and death.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who has an infection can develop sepsis; however the below list highlights the most 'at risk'

- Babies younger than 1 year
- People over 75
- People who are frail
- People with diabetes
- People with weak immune systems
- People who are having chemotherapy treatment
- Pregnant women or women who have recently been pregnant
- People who have recently had surgery
- People who have recently had a serious illness.
- People with indwelling lines or catheters.

What are the symptoms?

- High body temperature or low body temperature
- Fast heartbeat/breathing
- Feeling dizzy or faint/loss of consciousness
- A change in mental state, for example, confusion or disorientation
- Diarrhoea/nausea and vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Severe muscle pain
- Breathlessness
- Reduced urine production
- Cold, clammy and pale or mottled skin.

You may experience only some of these symptoms, or other symptoms which are not listed here.

How is it treated?

Your healthcare team will:

- Take some blood for tests
- Give you extra fluids through a drip or injection if you need them – this should happen within an hour of arriving at hospital
- Give you oxygen if you need it
- Give you antibiotics within an hour
- Examine you to see if they can find where the infection started
- If pus has collected anywhere in the body, a surgical operation may be needed to drain it
- Urine tests, X-rays and/or further imaging
- Monitor your urine output (check how much you wee)
- this may include a urinary catheter.

How long will you be in hospital?

If you develop sepsis you can become severely ill. You will need to be admitted to hospital and may need to be admitted to an intensive care unit for closer monitoring. The length of time you spend in hospital will depend on many factors including how severe the infection is and how unwell you were before coming to hospital.

Here at Brighton and Sussex university hospital trust we are committed to raising awareness of sepsis by understanding and improving knowledge of all healthcare professionals, patients, relatives and carers. We have developed tools to help early identification of sepsis, and to appropriately manage patients in a timely manner making sure that treatment is delivered as quickly as possible.

Sepsis is a complex syndrome and can be difficult to define, diagnose and treat. It is a major cause of death, killing approximately 44,000 patients annually in the UK (that is more than bowel cancer, breast cancer and prostate cancer put together). The rapid diagnosis and management of patients with sepsis is vital to successful treatment. Patients who have developed sepsis could already be critically ill, and will require immediate attention to avoid rapid deterioration; therefore, it is necessary to treat the patient at the same time as confirming the diagnosis.

Recovering from sepsis

There are a number of physical as well as psychological and emotional factors that can affect the recovery time after suffering from sepsis. Some are listed below:

Physical

- Reduced mobility
- Reduced appetite
- Excessive tiredness
- Breathlessness
- Hair loss

Psychological and emotional

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Poor concentration
- Memory loss
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Flashbacks/vivid dreams

This group of problems has become known as Post Sepsis Syndrome (PSS).

Not all patients experience the problems listed above after suffering from sepsis. The length of stay in the hospital and the severity of the sepsis episode as well as your general fitness have a large impact on how fast the recovery can be.

The UK Sepsis Trust now provides a service which enables adults who have been affected by sepsis to communicate on a one to one basis either by email through the website and or telephone on **0800 800 0029**. There may also be a sepsis support group within your local area.

Other resources

Sepsis Trust – www.sepsistrust.org

NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk/conditions/sepsis/

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Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

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