



What Is Sepsis?

Each year, sepsis affects up to 3 million people in the United States.¹

Sepsis is a serious condition that can lead to organ failure and death. Sepsis kills more people in the U.S. than breast, lung, and prostate cancer combined, and kills more children in the US than pediatric cancers.^{2,3}

More than half of sepsis survivors are left with post-sepsis syndrome (PSS), which can result in mild to severe and/or mental disability.⁴

Sepsis must always be treated as a medical emergency.

¹Crit Care Med. 2013 May;41(5):1167-74

²HCUP, 2006

³Leading Causes of Death, CDC, 2014

⁴JAMA. 2010;304(16):1787-1794

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We are exposed to a variety of organisms every day, many of which can cause infections. They can be bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites. Infections can occur when these organisms enter our body through openings in our skin (cuts, surgical incisions, bites, etc.), through breathing them in, or even consuming them if they are present in what we eat or drink.

Normally, our immune system would fight off any organism it sees as being a danger, keeping us from getting sick. But sometimes, our immune system reacts too vigorously to the danger that it causes serious injury to the body itself. When this happens, healthy cells and organs are damaged. This is a life-threatening condition called sepsis.

Although bacterial infections are the most common cause, any kind of infection can trigger sepsis. But the symptoms of sepsis are similar to many other mild illnesses, which makes sepsis more difficult to diagnose. We do not know why an infection would cause sepsis in one person but not another, but we do know that sepsis can cause:

- Fluid to leak from the blood vessels, causing swelling (edema)
- Drop in blood pressure, reducing blood flow to vital organs
- Small blood clots in the blood vessels, blocking blood from carrying oxygen and nutrients to the body's organs and tissues

These effects can cause organ dysfunction – the organs stop working properly. This is called severe sepsis and can lead to septic shock.

- Heart: Blood pressure drops, heart beat (pulse) is rapid
- Lungs: Low oxygen levels in your blood, difficulty breathing
- Kidneys: Little or no urine output
- Brain: Confusion, coma

Sepsis is a medical emergency. Time for treatment is of the essence. Fluids and antibiotics must be given as quickly as possible.

Talk to your healthcare provider to understand treatment options.

For more information on sepsis, visit Sepsis.org