



SEPSIS AND AMPUTATIONS

Sepsis can do a lot of harm to your body, from shutting down your body's organs to causing blood clots that block the flow of your blood. Sometimes the damage is irreparable.

Often incorrectly called blood poisoning, sepsis is the body's deadly response to infection. Sepsis kills and disables millions and requires early suspicion and rapid treatment for survival.

Sepsis and septic shock can result from an infection anywhere in the body, such as pneumonia and urinary tract infections, and viral infections like the flu, as well as from seemingly innocent injuries, like infected bug bites or scratches. 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, organ dysfunction (organs don't work properly), and/or amputations.

BLOOD CLOTS AND SEPSIS

When someone has sepsis, the blood clotting mechanism begins to work overtime. While your blood is supposed to clot when it's exposed outside the body, like when you cut your finger, it's not supposed to do this inside your blood

vessels. With sepsis, tiny blood clots can form throughout your blood vessels, making it difficult for blood to pass and bring vital oxygen and nutrients to the organs and tissues. As the small blood clots build up, they can block the blood vessels completely.

When oxygen and nutrients can't get to the tissues in the fingers, hands, arms, toes, feet, and legs, the tissues begin to die and develop gangrene. At first, the skin may look mottled, bluish purple, and then finally black.

Dead tissue must be removed because it can cause infection to spread. If the gangrenous area is small enough, the surgeon may be able to remove just enough to stop further spreading. However, if the damage is extensive, an amputation may be needed.

AMPUTATION SURGERY

According to new research, published in early 2020, approximately 1% of sepsis patients undergo one or more surgical amputations of a limb or digit. This is potentially 17,000 amputees per year resulting from sepsis. Patients may lose one limb or digit or several. Each counts as one amputation.

When an amputation is needed, the surgeon must decide at what level it must be done. The decision is based on ensuring that enough tissue is removed to make certain that all damaged tissue is gone, while trying to preserve the patient's independence and mobility as much as possible.

After surgery has begun, the surgeon may have to do a larger amputation than originally planned. Much of the procedure depends on the condition of the muscles and the skin, and sometimes this isn't obvious before the surgery.

Once the amputation is complete, the surgeon has two options: leave the site open or close it up right away. An open site, where the incision is not sewn or stapled closed, allows the doctors and nurses to monitor for and remove any infected tissue that might have been left behind. If this procedure is chosen, the surgeon will close up the flap once he or she is sure that the site is completely clean and infection-free.



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:

- 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

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

To learn more about sepsis, or to read tributes and survivor stories, visit us online at [Sepsis.org](https://www.sepsis.org)

