

LIFE AFTER SEPSIS

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SEPSIS



WHAT IS SEPSIS?

Sometimes incorrectly called blood poisoning, sepsis is the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to an infection. Sepsis can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death. Like strokes or heart attacks, sepsis is a medical emergency that requires rapid diagnosis and treatment.

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, could cause sepsis.

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.



AFTER SEPSIS: WHAT IS NEXT?

After surviving sepsis, you may need to rebuild your strength. At first, you may need help with bathing, sitting up, walking, using the restroom, and performing other everyday activities.

If you have been severely affected, you may be transferred to a rehabilitation facility. The goal of rehabilitation is to restore you to your previous level of health, or as close to it as possible. If you are discharged to your home, you may have appointments for follow-up as you work to recuperate. Begin your rehabilitation slowly and rest when you are tired.

AFTER YOU ARE HOME

You have been seriously ill, and your mind and body need time to heal. Whether you go home from the hospital or go to a rehabilitation facility, you may experience some of the following symptoms:

- Weakness and fatigue
- Breathlessness
- General body aches and pains
- Difficulty moving
- Difficulty sleeping
- Weight loss, lack of appetite
- Dry, itching, peeling skin
- Brittle nails
- Weight loss

You also may:

- Feel unsure of yourself
- Want to be alone
- Have nightmares or flashbacks
- Feel confused about what is real and what isn't
- Not be able to concentrate
- Feel depressed, angry, unmotivated
- Feel frustration at your limitations





FINDING WAYS TO HELP YOUR-SELF RECOVER AT HOME

Here are some tips that may help you recover once you go home:

- Set small goals each week, such as walking up the stairs or taking a bath.
- Rest and allow your body to rebuild its strength.
- Talk to family and friends about your feelings.
- Record your thoughts, feelings, and milestones in a journal.
- Learn about sepsis to help understand what happened.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
- Exercise as you feel able.
- Make a list to take with you when you visit your health care provider for check-ups.

THE EFFECT ON CAREGIVERS

Caregivers of loved ones with sepsis can also be affected. Stress, anxiety, and depression are not uncommon among family members and friends who have loved ones recovering from sepsis-related health issues. It is very important that they take time to care for themselves, as well.

Visit sepsis.org to download a copy of *When a Loved One Has Sepsis: A Caregiver's Guide*.

POSSIBLE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SEPSIS

Many people who have sepsis, even septic shock, eventually experience a full recovery. However, some people, especially those with chronic illnesses, are older, and those who were in an ICU, are at risk for long-term problems, such as post-sepsis syndrome (PSS).

POST-SEPSIS SYNDROME

Post-sepsis syndrome (PSS) is a term that describes a group of health issues affecting some people who survive severe sepsis or septic shock. These problems may not become apparent until several weeks after hospitalization. They may include:

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

Most often, the problems listed here do resolve over time. Some hospitals have follow-up clinics for people who survived serious illness to help after discharge. Ask if your facility or doctor's office provides this service, or if there are local resources available to help you while you recover.

If you are not improving or you are finding it difficult to cope, call your healthcare provider for help.

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SEPSIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

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

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LIFE AFTER SEPSIS, VISIT SEPSIS.ORG

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