



SEPSIS ALLIANCE

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What is Sepsis?

Sepsis occurs when an infection or injury causes your body to stop protecting you, and starts to attack you instead.

The signs and symptoms of sepsis vary widely.

Sepsis can cause organs to fail, requiring life support.

If you have concerns about sepsis, ask your medical team about it.

Everyday, we are exposed to a variety of infectious organisms such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi, through the air we breathe, water we drink, or even cuts and bruises we may acquire. Our immune system is constantly at work identifying and destroying these organisms, thereby keeping us healthy. Sometimes in response to a potentially serious infection, the immune system overreacts and ends up hurting our healthy cells and organs. This is a serious condition called sepsis.

Sepsis affects over 750,000 Americans and kills at least 215,000 each year – making it one of the most common causes of death. Any kind of infection or injury, anywhere in the body can trigger sepsis. The signs and symptoms of sepsis are common to many other illnesses making it difficult to diagnose.

While we still don't know why our bodies react this way, we know that sepsis can cause...

- the lining of blood vessels to leak (much like a water hose with holes in it)
- low blood pressure with reduced blood flow to vital organs
- small clots throughout the body that prevents nutrients from reaching vital organs.

In many cases, these changes cause a person's organs to stop working. Some of the signs that organs are affected include:

- Heart – low blood pressure, fast pulse
- Lungs – low oxygen level, problems breathing
- Kidneys – making very little urine
- Brain – confusion, coma

In treating sepsis, time is of the essence. A person can become very sick very quickly, so noticing sepsis as soon as possible is very important. Antibiotics (medicines that treat infections) and intravenous fluids (a salt solution given in the vein) need to be given as soon as possible to have the best chance at helping someone survive.

Talk to your medical team to understand your treatment options.

For more information:

Factsheets in the series:

Sepsis Treatment: A Glossary of Terms

Sepsis: Understanding Risk

Websites:

The Sepsis Alliance: www.sepsisalliance.org

International Sepsis Forum: www.sepsisforum.org/whitebook.htm

Surviving Sepsis Campaign: www.survivingsepsis.org