Recovering after sepsis

Call 911 if someone with an infection becomes suddenly confused, has severe trouble breathing or gets much worse quickly. Tell the dispatcher you are concerned about sepsis, a life-threatening reaction to infection.

Sepsis is a medical emergency. With a suspected infection and sudden confusion, severe trouble breathing or rapid worsening, call 911 or alert hospital staff immediately.

What Is Sepsis?

Sepsis is the body's life-threatening response to an infection. The infection may begin in the lungs, urinary tract, skin, digestive tract or another area. Without prompt treatment, sepsis can damage organs and can be fatal. People with chronic conditions such as diabetes can be at greater risk. The CDC estimates that about 1.7 million adults develop sepsis in the United States each year. If you suspect sepsis, seek emergency care immediately.

Knowing the signs and symptoms of sepsis can help a patient recognize what is happening and obtain the correct medical treatment quickly.

The following is a list of sepsis symptoms and signs that can appear either on their own or together:

- Confusion or disorientation
- Fever, shivering, or feeling very cold
- Shortness of breath
- High heart rate
- Clammy or sweaty skin
- Extreme pain or discomfort

According to the Center for Disease Control, anyone can get sepsis, however, certain risk factors can elevate an individual's likelihood of developing it. Patients who are over the age of 65 or under the age of 1 are at a higher risk for sepsis. Patients with weakened immune systems are also more susceptible, as are patients with chronic medical conditions like lung disease, cancer, diabetes, or kidney disease. Another group of patients at risk are those with implanted medical devices, such as IV catheters or breathing tubes.

Sepsis Complications

Having sepsis can lead to additional medical complications for some patients. One of these complications is septic shock. This happens when a patient with sepsis has low blood pressure that does not improve with fluids. The next step in treatment would be a medication called a vasopressor, which can help keep the blood flowing into the organs. Without treatment, insufficient blood flow can result in organs not getting enough oxygen, which will lead to failure of those organs (the brain, kidneys, lungs, or heart). Low blood pressure is a sign of sepsis shock and should be monitored closely. Septic shock can potentially lead to other problems like chronic pain, poorly functioning organs, post-intensive care syndrome, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Sepsis is a life-threatening response to infection. If someone with an infection becomes suddenly confused, very short of breath or rapidly worse, seek emergency help. Call 911 and mention your concern for sepsis.

Additional steps to preventing sepsis:

- When a patient has a bacterial infection, it is critical to follow the doctor's instructions regarding antibiotic treatment.
- Treat fungal and parasite infections as quickly as possible.
- If you have diabetes, follow your doctor's orders to keep it under control.

What Is The Best Path To Sepsis Recovery?

If the condition is discovered quickly enough, sepsis treatment can be effective. Medications such as antibiotics can be prescribed and administered through an IV, to distribute them into the bloodstream quickly. If the infection worsens, medications such as vasopressors and corticosteroids may be prescribed. Sepsis treatments can be administered in hospital and long-term acute care hospital settings, as they both have the ability to diagnosis and treat sepsis. Once a patient has medically recovered from sepsis, rehabilitation may be needed to assist the patient with learning to walk again or simply taking care of daily tasks.

Hospital care for sepsis includes prompt recognition, treatment of infection and support for affected organs. After stabilization, discuss any ongoing IV medicines, wound needs, dialysis, breathing support and rehabilitation.

Questions for the treating team about the current plan

- Ask what changes in temperature, blood pressure, alertness or breathing the team is monitoring.
- Ask who reviews test results and how a new result could change the infection treatment.
- Ask whether cultures, lactate testing or other assessments are being used and what the results mean for this patient.
- An individualized plan of care and creation of interdisciplinary goals.
- Before discharge, ask for written warning signs and contacts for the patient and family.

Archived recovery account

This account describes care in an earlier setting. The course, timing and outcome belong to that individual.

The patient was admitted to a general hospital for exploratory surgery to address a gastric ulcer. Unfortunately after the procedure she developed sepsis and respiratory failure, requiring her to be placed on a ventilator and subsequently given a feeding tube as she was unable to take anything by mouth. She also started treatment with IV antibiotics for the infection. She remained at the hospital until she was stable enough to be transferred to the treating hospital where she would receive medical care, respiratory therapy and rehabilitation.

At the beginning of her stay, the patient was completely dependent on her caregivers for all her needs, and although she was weakened by her ordeal, she remained upbeat and positive from the outset and started to make progress. Her first milestone was reached when she was able to be taken off the ventilator, thanks to the diligent work from her team of respiratory therapists. Her infection was successfully brought under control with ongoing IV antibiotic therapy, and with help from her physical and occupational therapists the

patient made excellent progress and was able to get up from bed, stand on her own and walk with the aid of a rolling walker.

She was surprised by her progress, grateful for the help reaching her goals and looking forward to being home.

Patient information — https://www.cdc.gov/sepsis/about/index.html

Talk with Lakeview

For questions about a possible stay, call Lakeview Admissions at (262) 534-8509. During a stay, ask the bedside nurse who can help with your question.