

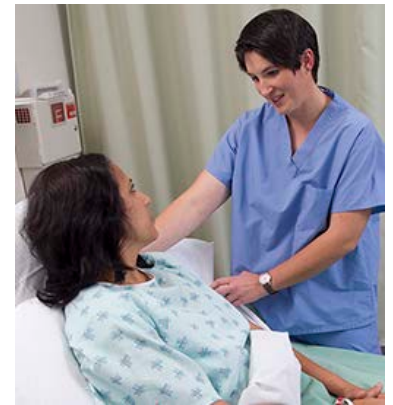
## Life After Sepsis

### *What you need to know*

*This handout is for patients who have had sepsis. It tells what to expect during recovery, how to take care of yourself, what the long-term effects might be, and when to call the doctor.*

### **What is sepsis?**

*Sepsis* is a very serious health problem that must be treated right away. It occurs when the body responds too strongly to an infection. This response is so strong that the body harms itself. Sepsis can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.



### **What causes sepsis?**

Any major infection can cause sepsis. Infections occur when germs enter the body and multiply. These germs may be a virus, bacteria, or fungus. Sepsis is most often linked with infections in the lungs (*pneumonia*), kidneys, urinary tract, skin, and gut.

*Ask your nurse if you have any questions about your recovery plan.*

### **What are the first steps in recovery?**

After you have had sepsis, your rehabilitation (rehab) usually starts in the hospital. Your caregivers will support you as you slowly start to move around and look after yourself. They will help you bathe, sit up, stand, walk, and go to the restroom.

The purpose of rehab is to restore you back to your previous level of health, or as close to it as possible. Begin your rehab by building up your activities slowly. Rest when you are tired.

### **How will I feel when I get home?**

You have been seriously ill. Your body and mind need time to get better. You may have these symptoms after you get home:

- Weakness and fatigue (feeling very tired)
- Feeling breathless
- Body pains or aches
- Problems moving around
- Problems sleeping
- Weight loss, lack of appetite, food not tasting normal
- Dry and itchy skin that may peel
- Brittle nails
- Hair loss

It is also common to have these feelings once you are home:

- Unsure of yourself
- Not caring about how you look
- Wanting to be alone, avoiding friends and family
- Flashbacks, bad memories
- Problems concentrating, confusion, not sure what is real
- Feeling anxious, more worried than usual
- Depression, anger, a lack of motivation
- Frustration at not being able to do everyday tasks

### **How can I help myself recover at home?**

- Set weekly goals for yourself that you can easily meet. These may include taking a bath, dressing yourself, or walking up stairs.
- Rest and rebuild your strength.
- Talk about what you are feeling to family and friends.
- Write your thoughts, struggles, and milestones in a journal.
- Learn about sepsis to understand what happened.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- If you have gaps in your memory, ask your family to tell you what happened while you were sick.
- Exercise if you feel up to it. Start slowly and rest as needed.
- Make a list of questions to ask your provider when you go for a checkup.

## Are there any long-term effects of sepsis?

Many people recover fully after sepsis and their lives return to normal. For other patients, there are long-term effects.

Some issues may show up weeks after you leave the hospital. They include:

- *Insomnia* (problems getting to sleep or staying asleep)
- Nightmares, daydreams that seem real, panic attacks
- Strong muscle and joint pains
- Problems thinking clearly
- Loss of self-esteem and self-belief
- Organ issues such as kidney failure or lung problems
- Loss of a limb (*amputation*)

## When should I call the doctor?

Most of these problems improve with time. They are a normal part of recovery from sepsis.

Call your doctor if you feel that you are not getting better or you are finding it hard to cope.

## Where can I learn more?

Visit these websites to learn more about sepsis:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**  
*cdc.gov/sepsis cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections*
- **The Rory Staunton Foundation for Sepsis Prevention**  
*rorystauntonfoundationforsepsis.org*

This foundation supports education and outreach efforts aimed at rapid diagnosis and treatment of sepsis.

- **Sepsis Alliance**  
*sepsis.org*

This organization offers information on a variety of topics related to sepsis. Visit *sepsis.org/library* for a full list of titles.

*Content in this handout is based on materials developed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Use of this material does not imply endorsement by CDC, ATSDR, HHS or the United States Government of UW Medicine or its affiliates. The source materials are available on the CDC website for no charge.*

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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