

Sepsis, Self Care, Adult

Sepsis is a serious illness that may require intensive care in the hospital. The following information explains what you need to know in order to manage your condition after you are discharged from the hospital.

What are the risks?

After being treated for sepsis and discharged from the hospital, you may be at a higher risk for certain problems. These problems may be physical or mental.

Physical problems:

- Weakness and tiredness.
- Shortness of breath.
- Pain in many areas of the body.
- Difficulty walking.
- Dry, itchy skin.
- Lack of appetite. This may lead to weight loss.
- Organ failure.

Mental problems:

- Difficulty sleeping.
- Depression.
- Confusion.
- Anxiety and worry caused by having gone through a bad experience (*post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD*).
- Low self-esteem.

Follow these instructions at home:

Medicines

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- If you were prescribed an antibiotic, antiviral, or antifungal medicine, take it as told by your health care provider. **Do not** stop taking the medicine even if you start to feel better.

Eating and drinking

- Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein. Ask your health care provider if you should avoid certain foods.
- Drink enough fluid to keep your urine pale yellow.



Alcohol use

- **Do not** drink alcohol if:
 - Your health care provider tells you not to drink.
 - You are pregnant, may be pregnant, or are planning to become pregnant.

- If you drink alcohol, limit how much you use to:
 - 0–1 drink a day for women.
 - 0–2 drinks a day for men.
 - Be aware of how much alcohol is in your drink. In the U.S., one drink equals one 12 oz bottle of beer (355 mL), one 5 oz glass of wine (148 mL), or one 1½ oz glass of hard liquor (44 mL).

Activity

- Rest and gradually return to your normal activities. Ask your health care provider what activities are safe for you.
- Avoid sitting for a long time without moving. Get up to take short walks every 1–2 hours. This is important to improve blood flow and breathing. Ask for help if you feel weak or unsteady.
- Try to set small, achievable goals each week, such as dressing yourself, bathing, or walking up the stairs. It may take a while to rebuild your strength.
- Try to exercise regularly if you feel healthy enough to do so. Ask your health care provider what exercises are safe for you.

Preventing infection

- Keep your vaccinations up to date. Get the flu shot every year.
- Wash your hands often using soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Practice good hygiene. Keep cuts clean and covered until healed.



Managing stress

Talk with your health care provider or counselor about ways to reduce stress. He or she may suggest:

- Meditation, muscle relaxation, and breathing exercises.
- Talk therapy.
- Spending time on hobbies and activities that you enjoy.

General instructions

- Get the right amount and quality of sleep. Most adults need 7–9 hours of sleep each night. To help with sleep:
 - Keep your bedroom cool and dark.
 - **Do not** eat a heavy meal within one hour of bedtime.
 - **Do not** drink alcohol or caffeinated drinks before bed.
 - Avoid screen time, such as television, computers, tablets, or cell phones before bed.
- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- Talk to trusted family members and friends about your condition. Explain your symptoms to them, and let them know that you are working with a health care provider to treat your condition. This can provide you with one way to get support and guidance.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important.

Questions to ask your health care provider:

- What physical and emotional changes do I need to report?
- Do I need to have someone with me all the time?
- Is it safe for me to drive?

Contact a health care provider if you:

- Do not feel like you are getting better or regaining strength.
- Have muscle or joint pain.
- Frequently feel tired.
- Are having trouble coping with your recovery.
- Have nightmares, or trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Feel sad, down, or depressed more often than not, every day for more than 2 weeks.
- Have difficulty concentrating.
- Feel irritable or you cry for no reason.

Get help right away if you:

- Have difficulty breathing.
- Have a rapid or skipping heartbeat.
- Become confused or disoriented.
- See, hear, or feel things that do not exist (*hallucinations*).
- Have a high fever.
- Have an infection that is getting worse or not getting better.
- You have thoughts of hurting yourself or others.

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.**

Summary

- Sepsis is a serious illness that may require intensive care in a hospital. You may experience long-term health effects after you are discharged from the hospital.
- Try to set small, achievable goals each week, such as dressing yourself, bathing, or walking up the stairs. It may take a while to rebuild your strength.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important.
- Know what symptoms you should get help right away for.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.