
Understanding Post Sepsis Syndrome (PSS)

Sepsis is a serious illness caused by the body's extreme immune response to an infection. Bacteria are the most common cause of an infection that leads to sepsis. The most common infections are pneumonia, abdominal infections, and urinary tract infections. Sepsis can lead to organ failure. When this happens, it needs to be treated in the intensive care unit (ICU) at a hospital. In the worst case, sepsis can be life-threatening. If a person survives sepsis, there can be long-term effects, both physical and psychological, such as fatigue, decreased mental functioning, sleep problems, chronic pain, and even posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is called post sepsis syndrome (PSS).

How post sepsis syndrome happens

Anyone can get sepsis, but infants, children, and the elderly are at greater risk. Up to half of people who survive sepsis go on to get PSS.

The reason why some people get PSS and others don't isn't well understood. The risk of developing PSS is higher for those admitted to an ICU unit or those who have been in a hospital for extended periods of time. There is no specific lab test to diagnose PSS. But your provider may diagnose PSS based on your symptoms and condition.

Symptoms of post sepsis syndrome

The symptoms of PSS may include:

- Extreme tiredness
- Chronic pain and weakness
- Hair loss and skin rashes
- Sleep problems such as insomnia and nightmares
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble swallowing
- Vision changes
- Decreased mental functioning
- Memory loss
- Loss of self-esteem
- Depression and anxiety
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Treatment for post sepsis syndrome

After you have had sepsis, your rehabilitation usually starts in the hospital before you are sent home. Your healthcare team will help you move and take care of yourself, from standing and walking to getting to the bathroom. When recognized, your treatment may include physical therapy and rehabilitation along with counseling and mental health support. The purpose of rehabilitation is to restore your previous level of health or get you back as close to it as possible.

When to call your healthcare provider after your discharge

If you've had sepsis, talk with your healthcare provider if you're having symptoms that may suggest PSS, like ongoing fatigue and weakness, memory loss, or trouble concentrating.

Be aware of the symptoms of sepsis. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed
- Pain that gets worse
- Symptoms that don't get better, or get worse
- New symptoms
- Recurrent infections