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Adult sepsis safety net

Sepsis is a severe condition that can be fatal if not caught early. Signs and symptoms can be vague or severe. This leaflet will let you know what symptoms to look out for.

This leaflet was originally produced in collaboration with [The UK Sepsis Trust](#) – it has since been updated. This charity is committed to raising awareness of sepsis and improving the care of patients with sepsis.

Sepsis is a life-threatening condition and needs emergency treatment in hospital. The symptoms of sepsis may be vague and not specific so seek medical advice immediately if you have any concerns. Any delays in treatment can be fatal.

Every year in the UK, there are around 250,000 people diagnosed with [sepsis](#). 52,000 people die (1,000 children). This means a quarter of people who have sepsis will die if not treated early. There has been a huge drive for its recognition by patients and doctors. In fact, GPs need to repeat their training yearly to recognise this and let patients know what to look for and when to seek help.

What are the symptoms of sepsis?

You should always seek help if you, or anyone you're with, develops symptoms as below:

Slurred speech or confusion.

Extreme shivering or muscle pain.

Passing no urine (in a day – 18 hours).

Severe breathlessness.

It feels like you're going to die.

Skin is mottled or discoloured.

Other severe symptoms which could suggest sepsis include:

- VERY high temperature (fever above 38°C) or low body temperature (feels very cold- lower than 36°C).
- Feeling very sleepy or about to lose consciousness.
- Severe tummy (abdominal) pain.
- Feeling very dizzy or faint, or having a fit (seizure).
- A rash which does not fade with pressure. The glass test can be used - pressing a clear glass over the rash - the rash should fade; if it doesn't, you must call an ambulance immediately.
- Not eating any food or drinking any fluid.
- Being sick (vomiting) repeatedly.

If you do have sepsis you may also have other symptoms of infection such as a flu-like illness (cough, fever, muscle aches and joint pains) or diarrhoea and vomiting.

Early treatment saves lives. Call an emergency ambulance - 999 in the UK - if you are very concerned. Call your GP immediately if you're concerned but don't think you need to go straight to hospital. **If there is any delay in talking to a doctor then call an ambulance immediately.**

Further reading

- [Sepsis - recognition, diagnosis and early management](#); NICE Guideline (July 2016 - updated January 2024)

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