

Sepsis Tip Sheet for Dialysis Patients

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a medical emergency. It is not an infection. It is the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to infection. Sepsis can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.



Who is at risk of getting sepsis?

- People with serious medical conditions (such as dialysis patients)
- People older than age 65
- People with weakened immune systems

What are the common infection sites of sepsis?

- Lungs/pneumonia
- Kidneys/urinary tract infections
- Skin/wounds
- Digestive tract/abdomen

How can I prevent sepsis?

Hand hygiene: Wash hands before eating; after toileting; after coughing or sneezing; before and after wound care; before taking medicine; before and after dialysis and care of a fistula/graft or central venous catheter (CVC); and after touching pets or other animals.

Access hygiene: Vascular access sites should always be kept clean and dry. CVC dressings should be clean and intact (bathing recommended instead of showering to keep dressings dry). Do not pick at dressings or sites.

General hygiene: Do not sleep with pets, especially if you have a CVC. Brush and floss teeth (or water floss as recommended) twice a day. See the dentist at least twice a year. Use clean towels whenever you are drying your access.

Wound care: Wash hands before touching an open wound. Use clean gloves, if possible. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. DO NOT pop blisters.

Permanent vascular access: Obtain a fistula or graft as soon as possible. CVCs increase the risk of infection and death.

Vaccinations: Get routine vaccinations like flu, COVID-19, shingles, pneumonia, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), etc.

Movement: Incorporate movement into activities of daily living; light exercise can help prevent pneumonia.

Medications: Take antibiotics EXACTLY as ordered by the healthcare provider.

Health maintenance: Take good care of chronic conditions like diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, and cancer.

References: Sepsis Alliance. Risk factors. Available at: <https://www.sepsis.org/sepsis-basics/risk-factors/>. Accessed on: January 29, 2025. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dialysis factsheet. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/sepsis/media/pdfs/Factsheet-dialysis-patients-need-to-know-508.pdf>. Accessed on January 29, 2025.