Sepsis

What is sepsis?
- Sepsis is a severe infection that occurs when the body’s reaction to an infection attacks its own tissues and organs.
- Anyone can develop sepsis from an infection.
- Sepsis can lead to shock, damage to your body’s organs and even death.

What are the symptoms of sepsis?
There is no one sign or symptom of sepsis, but rather a combination of signs and symptoms. Sepsis is suspected in patients with **two or more** of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Chills
- Altered mental state
- Feels ‘severely sick’
- Confusion
- Apathy
- Difficult or rapid breathing
- Low blood pressure
- Low urine output

Who is at risk of sepsis?
Sepsis can affect anyone although some people are at a higher risk for sepsis.

They include people who:
- are very old or very young
- are taking medications for cancer or transplantation
- have an illness affecting the immune system or are on long-term steroids
- have had recent surgery
- have chronic illnesses

How is sepsis diagnosed?
Sepsis is hard to diagnose because it happens quickly and can be confused with other illnesses. Sepsis is diagnosed using a number of physical findings like fever or low temperature, increased rate of breathing, or increased heart rate. Sepsis can also be diagnosed using laboratory testing that checks for infection.
How is sepsis treated?
Sepsis should be treated in-hospital as a medical emergency.

Doctors or nurses may:
- Perform an exam
- Give you oxygen
- Collect blood for laboratory testing
- Assess the need for fluids and give you fluids into your veins
- Quickly give antibiotics into your veins to fight the infection
- Regularly monitor your observations (heart rate, respiratory rate, temperature, etc.)

What are the long-term effects of sepsis?
- The length of illness and recovery varies from person to person
- Many people who have sepsis recover entirely and their lives return to normal
- Some people, especially those who have required prolonged treatment in an Intensive Care Unit may experience longer term problems including permanent organ damage.
- Longer term effects may include
  - Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
  - Difficulty returning to work
  - Reduced energy levels
  - Musculoskeletal problems.

Your medical team will discuss your ongoing care with you.

What should you do if you think you have sepsis?
Seek immediate medical treatment if you have signs of sepsis following an infection. If you are continuing to feel worse or are not getting better ask your doctor about sepsis.

References
This brochure has been adapted from material created by the NSW Clinical Excellence Commission, UK Sepsis Trust, and Australian Sepsis Network.