



Sepsis and Aging

Sepsis can strike anyone at any time, but some segments of the population are more at risk than others. People over the age of 65, particularly those who have health issues, are 13 times more likely to develop sepsis and they make up 65% of sepsis cases in the hospitals. Mortality rates are also higher in older patients—sepsis is tenth leading cause of death for those aged 65 and over—and increases with advanced age. Research shows that elderly patients are much more likely to suffer lasting consequences from sepsis. In addition to amputation and organ failure, which are common outcomes for any sepsis survivor, older patients can suffer major cognitive and physical limitations as a result of the condition.

Symptoms.

- Confusion and tiredness is a major sign of sepsis for older people
- Fever and chills
- Rapid breathing
- Mottled or dusky skin
- Elevated heart rate
- Pain and physical discomfort

Causes.

Older people are more likely to develop sepsis due to:

- Aging immune systems and frailer bodies
- Extended hospital stays and surgeries

Causes (continued)

- Insertion of catheters, feed tubes and IV's which increase the likelihood of infection
- Chronic diseases such as diabetes, lung and kidney disease, stroke, heart attack and hypertension have also been shown to significantly increase the patient's risk of developing sepsis.

Diagnosis.

As diagnosing sepsis can be difficult, doctors often order a battery of tests to try to determine evidence of infection, clotting problems, abnormal liver or kidney function, impaired oxygen availability and/ or electrolyte imbalances.

Treatment.

A number of medications are used in treating sepsis, including antibiotics to treat the infection, vasopressors which help to increase blood pressure and IV fluids. Early, aggressive treatment boosts the chances of surviving sepsis. Elderly people with severe sepsis require close monitoring and treatment in a hospital intensive care unit.

Prevention.

The most important factor in preventing sepsis in the elderly is to prevent and treat infections immediately. Infections can also be reduced by proper care of all wounds. Regular vaccinations act as a prevention for illness such as the flu or pneumonia which are both risk factor for sepsis.

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