

# Kidney *Chronicles*

IPRO END-STAGE RENAL DISEASE NETWORK OF NEW ENGLAND

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HELPFUL TIPS  
TO EMPOWER  
ESRD PATIENTS  
AS CONSUMERS



Improving Healthcare  
for the Common Good®

## What is Sepsis? How do I prevent it?

**Y**ou may be hearing a lot about sepsis at your dialysis clinic, doctor's office, or hospital. This is because sepsis is a common and life-threatening condition that can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and sometimes death. It is important that everyone learn about its causes, symptoms, and ways to prevent this medical emergency.

### Causes

Sepsis is a serious complication of an infection. It can be caused by any type of infection—bacterial, viral, fungal, or even parasitic. Sepsis can't always be prevented once an infection has developed; but by doing your best to prevent infections and treating them as soon as possible if they occur, you can lower the risk of sepsis.

### Symptoms

In addition to having some type of infection, people with sepsis often have more than one of these symptoms:

- Fever;
- Confusion or unusual sleepiness;
- A fast heartbeat;
- Shortness of breath;
- Extreme pain; and/or
- Pale or discolored skin.

If you think you may have sepsis, call your doctor immediately.



### How the Network Serves You

- Advocates for you;
- Answers your questions about treatment, modality choices or other issues;
- Develops and provides educational materials for you and your family;
- Works with renal professionals to improve the care given to you;
- Helps keep you informed and updated to support your involvement in your care and treatment options; and
- Evaluates and resolves grievances.

**In an emergency,  
if you can't reach  
your facility,  
contact us.**

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Sepsis *continued from page 1*

## Ways to help prevent sepsis

Many infections can be prevented by practicing good hygiene (e.g., hand washing, bathing regularly). Other infections can be prevented with vaccinations (e.g., flu, pneumonia vaccines).

- Keep your vascular access site clean. After all, it is your lifeline! Wash your hands and permanent access site (AV fistula or AV graft) with soap and water before going to your dialysis chair and before leaving the dialysis unit;
- Wash your hands frequently;
- Make sure you have had all your vaccinations and that they are up to date. Prevent or identify infections early, before they spread and sepsis develops;
- Take and finish all antibiotics as prescribed, and do not take anyone else's antibiotics; and
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle. This includes following a healthy ESRD diet, exercising regularly and resting.

## Preventing sepsis at the dialysis unit

Your nurse or technician should follow these steps before and/or after touching a patient or a dialysis machine:

- Wash his/her hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub;
- Put on gloves;
- Clean each area of your permanent access site prior to needle insertion.

## Your Lifeline for a Lifetime

### Checking your AV Fistula or Graft Daily

A healthy vascular access is important to achieving the best outcomes for your treatment. It is essential to check your access every day, whether it is a fistula or a graft. These checks will help identify a problem early on and prevent your access from failing.

Once you learn these steps and practice them, it should only take one minute each day to do the check:

Look at the skin over your access and compare it to the skin surrounding your access. It should all look the same.

Listen to the sound (known as the bruit) of your access by placing it next to your ear. The sound should remain the same from day to day.

- Feel the vibration or buzz (known as the thrill) and the beating of the full length of the access. The thrill and beating should be the same every day.
- If you notice any changes in the look, sound, vibration or beating of your access, report them to your healthcare team (physician, nurse, or technician).

For more information on protecting your Lifeline for a Lifetime, please speak with your healthcare team, contact the Network or visit our website: <http://esrd.ipro.org/vascular-access>



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To file a grievance, please contact us:

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