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BLOOD POISONING (Septicemia; Septic Shock; Bacteremia)

General Information

Definition

Bacterial infection (or toxins from bacteria) in the blood that invade the entire body via the bloodstream.

Body Parts Involved

Total body.

Sex or Age Most Affected

Both sexes; all ages.

Signs & Symptoms

- Shaking chills.
- Rapid temperature rise.
- Rapid, pounding heartbeat.
- Warm, flushed skin.
- Confusion and other symptoms of mental impairment.
- Drop in blood pressure.
- General ill feeling.

Causes

Infection in some other body part, such as

Risk Increases With

- Adults over 60.
- Newborns and infants.
- Illness, such as diabetes, that has lowered resistance.
- Leukemia or other cancer.
- Use of immunosuppressive drugs or self-administered, intravenous drugs.
- Use of a catheter.
- Complicated labor or delivery.
- Certain surgical procedures.

How to Prevent

- Obtain medical treatment for any infection.
- If dental procedures have produced blood poisoning in the past or you have diseased heart valves, take antibiotics

before any dental treatment--including simple prophylaxis by a dentist or hygienist.

* Influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations for high-risk patients.



Diagnostic Measures

What to Expect

- * Your own observation of symptoms.
- * Medical history and physical exam by a doctor.
- * Laboratory studies, such as: culture of the blood to identify organisms responsible for the illness; urinalysis; blood count.

Appropriate Health Care

- * Doctor's treatment.
- * Hospitalization with intensive care treatment for severe cases.
- * Removal or drainage of source of infection.
- * Mechanical ventilation for respiratory failure.
- * Blood transfusions.

Possible Complications

- * Shock, with very low blood pressure, overwhelming infection and death.
- * Persistent infection of the heart valves.
- * Adult respiratory distress syndrome.
- * Multi-organ failure (heart, lungs, kidney, liver).

Probable Outcome

Dependent on underlying conditions, patient's health and any delay in treatment.



General Measures

How to Treat

This can be a frightening time for the patient's family. Intensive care units are intimidating places. Try to keep your spirits up, stay in close communications with the doctors and let them know the patient's preferences so that they can be incorporated into the clinical care.

Medication

Your doctor will utilize antibiotics to fight infections.

Activity

As directed by your doctor.

Diet

May require tube or intravenous feedings.

**Call Your Doctor If**

- You have symptoms of blood poisoning.
- The following occurs during treatment: Fever. Signs of infection (swelling, pain, redness) anywhere in your body.
- You plan elective surgery or a dental procedure after you have had an episode of blood poisoning.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

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