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## Septic shock

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### Alternative Names

bacteremic shock

### Definition

A serious, abnormal condition that occurs when blood flow through the body is insufficient resulting in low blood pressure and decreased urine output. It is caused by an overwhelming infection.

### Causes, Incidence and Risk Factors

Septic shock occurs more often in the very old and the very young and in people with other underlying illnesses. Many bacterial organisms can cause septic shock. Toxins released by bacteria can cause tissue damage and interfere with normal blood circulation.

The risk factors include underlying illnesses such as diabetes; hematologic cancers; and diseases of the genitourinary system, liver or biliary system, and intestinal system. Other risk factors are recent infection, prolonged antibiotic therapy, and a recent surgery or procedure. The incidence is approximately 3 out of 1,000,000 people annually.

See also

- [meningococemia](#)
- [Waterhouse-Friderichsen syndrome](#)
- [DIC \(disseminated intravascular coagulation\)](#)

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### Symptoms

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- low blood pressure, systolic usually less than 90
- drop in blood pressure when sitting or standing
- rapid heart rate (tachycardia)
- cool, pale extremities
- elevated temperature
- restlessness, agitation, or confusion
- low urine output
- chills

All in G.W.H. NOTES

Additional symptoms that may be associated with this disease:

- swelling, overall
- joint pain

#### Signs And Tests

- blood gases that reveal low oxygen concentration
- blood cultures to detect infection
- cardiac monitoring is consistent with high output

#### Treatment

Septic shock is a medical emergency; people are admitted to intensive care.

The objective of treatment is to:

- provide oxygen and treat respiratory distress if present
- elevate the legs to maximize blood flow to the brain
- administer intravenous fluids to restore blood volume and vasoactive drugs to treat low blood pressure
- treat underlying infections with antibiotics

Hemodynamic monitoring to evaluate the pressures in the heart and lungs in treatment of shock requires specialized equipment and intensive care nursing.

#### Expectations (Prognosis)

Septic shock has a high death rate, exceeding 50%, depending on the type of organism involved. The organism involved and the immediacy of hospitalization will determine the outcome.

#### Complications

Respiratory or cardiac failure can occur.

#### Calling Your Health Care Provider

Go to the emergency room if symptoms of septic shock are present. You may need to call an ambulance if you have no means of transportation or if you feel like you are unable to drive.

#### Prevention

Prompt treatment of infections caused by bacteria is helpful. However, many cases cannot be prevented.

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