

MANAGING YOUR TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME

What Is Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome is a severe, life-threatening form of blood poisoning caused by bacterial toxins. The best known type is related to tampon use during menstrual periods. However, both sexes can get it from wounds or infections of the skin, lungs, throat, or bones.

What Causes Toxic Shock Syndrome?

The cause is toxins made by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. The syndrome is related to use of contraceptive sponge and diaphragm birth control methods as well as tampon use. The second type is caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes* bacteria after they enter the body through injured skin from wounds caused by surgery or minor trauma, such as cuts, scrapes, and chickenpox blisters infected with bacteria.

What Are the Symptoms of Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Symptoms include sudden shaking and a fever (temperature often higher than 102° F), severe muscle pain or aches, vomiting, diarrhea, thirst, rapid pulse, deep red rash that looks like sunburn, severe weakness, headache, confusion, and low blood pressure. Symptoms of the streptococcal syndrome also include trouble breathing, dizziness, and weak and rapid pulse. The infected wound can look swollen and red, and liver and kidneys may stop working.

How Is Toxic Shock Syndrome Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from the medical history, symptoms, physical examination, and blood tests. The health care provider may want samples from infected areas, such as wounds and vagina, to check for bacterial growth.

How Is Toxic Shock Syndrome Treated?

Early diagnosis and hospital treatment are essential. Complications often include peeling of skin on the hands and feet, loss of hair and nails, kidney failure, congestive heart failure, and respiratory distress.

Intravenous fluids and antibiotics will be given in the hospital. Breathing problems may need oxygen and mechanical ventilation. Dialysis will be used for kidney failure.

After symptoms are controlled and initial dangers are over, care can be given at home. Antibiotics may still be needed. Rest is important, with activities increased slowly. Drink more fluids, and follow a well-balanced diet.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Toxic Shock Syndrome

- ✓ **DO** get treatment immediately for symptoms of toxic shock. It progresses rapidly and may be fatal if not treated.
- ✓ **DO** change tampons frequently.
- ✓ **DO** get medical treatment for wounds that look infected.
- ✓ **DO** finish all antibiotics.
- ✓ **DO** wash your hands carefully before you insert tampons. Bacteria are found on the skin, especially the hands.
- ✓ **DO** get immediate care if you have a fever or rash, especially during your period and when using tampons, or if you had recent surgery.
- ✓ **DO** realize that toxic shock syndrome can come back. People who have it once can get it again.
- ⊗ **DON'T** skip doses or stop antibiotics unless your health care provider tells you to.

- ⊗ **DON'T** ignore a wound if it looks red and swollen or has pus.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use superabsorbent tampons, especially overnight. Alternate tampons with sanitary napkins.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use tampons if you have a skin infection, especially in the genital area.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use tampons at all if you ever had toxic shock syndrome.

FROM THE DESK OF

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (404) 639-2215, (800) 232-4636;
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov>
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease: Tel: (301) 496-5717; Website:
<http://www3.niaid.nih.gov>

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