

The Shocking Truth about Sepsis

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Tanya Roberts collapsed while taking her dogs for a walk on Christmas Eve. The 65-year-old actress, best known for her roles in the James Bond film *A View to a Kill* and, most recently, *That '70s Show*, was rushed to the hospital where she was diagnosed with sepsis, which developed from a urinary tract infection (UTI) that had spread to her kidneys and gall bladder. Despite aggressive medical treatment, Roberts died 11 days later.

Her death may have come as a shock to some, considering how relatively common UTIs can be. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year at least 1.7 million adults in America develop sepsis with nearly 270,000 dying. Up to 31% of sepsis cases worldwide start as UTIs.

“Sepsis really implies a much wider and more advanced stage of infection. Basically the infection triggers a systemic response for the whole body. The whole body kind of detects this infection and really tries to fight it off.”

Rone Lin, M.D. is an infectious disease specialist with OSF HealthCare and Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria. He says sepsis is a body's response to infection, and while anyone can develop sepsis, the potential becomes greater the older we get because our immune systems get weaker and we can have additional health issues like diabetes.

Dr. Lin's advice for everyone: pay attention to what your body is telling you. He suggests that when you don't feel well, stop whatever you are doing, and listen closely to the internal message that your body sends out. If you feel feverish or have chills, check for fever with a thermometer. Recognizing fever early may lead to faster treatment and help prevent the progression of sepsis.

“The early stage of sepsis can be quite vague and people don't always recognize it. But typically if you have any palpitations where you feel like your heart is racing, if you feel a little dizziness, sometimes people can get a little bit nauseous - they might even vomit a little bit - those are all signs of something is not going well,” says Dr. Lin.

Dr. Lin also encourages everyone to drink more water. He says staying well-hydrated can help reduce or prevent a lot of health issues, including UTIs or a decrease in blood pressure.

“As the body's trying to fight this infection by triggering all of these systematic response, the blood pressure can drop and without enough blood pressure or blood supply to different organs - kidneys, lungs, brains, heart - all these organs can go into failure and people can die very quickly.”

Dr. Lin adds that during the early stage of infection, our body can compensate for the changes, however, the older we get, the less reserve we may have to do that. Therefore, it becomes very important not to ignore vital signs such as fever, especially in people older than age 65.

Treatment for sepsis does require hospitalization because of the quick response and antibiotics needed. Dr. Lin says hospital emergency departments have specific treatment protocols and guidelines so if someone is experiencing symptoms that could potentially be sepsis, they should seek medical care immediately.

Learn more about sepsis [here](#).