

Title: Septic Arthritis

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Abstract: Patient education material addressing the presentation, diagnosis, and treatment of septic arthritis.

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How is septic arthritis treated?

- **Antibiotics** - Like infections in other parts of the body, the primary treatment for septic arthritis is antibiotics. Intravenous antibiotics are often used in the beginning of treatment to insure rapid elimination of infection. Since infections in the joint space can be difficult to eliminate, patients with septic arthritis may be required to take antibiotics for up to 6 weeks to insure that the infection does not return. Your physician may obtain periodic blood tests to make sure that the infection is improving.
- **Removal of Joint Fluid** - Removal of infected joint fluid is necessary in the treatment of septic arthritis to help eliminate bacteria from the joint space and increase the effectiveness of antibiotics. Joint fluid is removed by either joint aspiration or arthroscopic surgery. In arthroscopic surgery, a camera and surgical tools are inserted through small incisions around the affected joint to identify and remove collections of infectious material.

Will I make a full recovery?

Most patients with septic arthritis are able to make a full recovery after appropriate treatment with antibiotics. However, if left untreated for even a few days, septic arthritis can cause significant and permanent damage to the affected joint. In addition, there is a risk that the infection may spread to nearby bone or may cause a system wide that can be life-threatening. Because of the potential of serious consequences it is important to seek immediate medical attention if you suspect that you or your child has developed septic arthritis.



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Septic Arthritis

A Patient Guide



What is septic arthritis?

Septic arthritis is an infection inside a joint that causes considerable pain, swelling, warmth, and redness of the joint. Septic arthritis usually involves the knee, hip, shoulder, or ankle, but other joints can be affected. Untreated septic arthritis can rapidly cause permanent damage to the joint and can result in life threatening illness or bone infections.

What causes septic arthritis?

Septic arthritis is caused by microorganisms (usually bacteria) that have been able to gain access to the joint space and cause infection. Bacteria may gain access to the joint space through the blood stream or from adjacent tissues. Sometimes bacteria are introduced into the joint as the result of an injury or surgical procedure. Often the specific source of bacteria is unknown.



When should I suspect septic arthritis in my infant or child?

Septic arthritis commonly affects both infants and young children. You should seek immediate medical care if your infant or child experiences any of the following symptoms:

Infant

- Crying with movement of a joint
- Inability to move a joint
- Irritability
- Fever
- Persistent Crying

Child or Adolescent

- Intense joint pain
- Joint swelling and/or redness
- Fever and/or chills
- Inability to move a joint
- Inability to bear weight on a joint

How is septic arthritis diagnosed?

- **Joint Aspiration** - Septic arthritis is usually identified by collecting a sample of joint fluid and examining that fluid for the presence of bacteria or evidence of infection. Joint fluid is collected by inserting of a small needle into the joint space.



- **Laboratory Tests** - Your physician may perform blood tests to identify the presence of bacteria in your blood stream and to identify signs that your body is fighting an infection.
- **Imaging** – An x-ray of the affected joint may be obtained to see if the infection has caused damage to the joint itself.