

# Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a form of blood poisoning. It rarely occurs, but it can be fatal.

## Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms come on fast and are often severe.

- High sudden fever. Sore throat.
- Flat, red, sunburn-like rash on the trunk of the body that spreads. The skin on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet peels. Redness of the lips, eyes, and tongue may also occur.
- Muscle aches. Extreme fatigue and weakness.
- Abdominal pain. Diarrhea. Vomiting.
- Rapid pulse.
- Dizziness. Confusion. Fainting.

## Causes

Toxic shock syndrome is caused when certain bacteria release toxins in the blood. It can result from wounds or an infection in the throat, lungs, skin, or bone. Most often, though, it affects women who use super absorbent tampons. These trap and allow bacteria to grow and spread. Though not common, TSS can also occur after surgery, including a C-section.

## Treatment

Toxic shock syndrome requires emergency medical care.

## Questions to Ask

Are signs and symptoms of toxic shock syndrome listed on this page present?

YES



Get Medical Care Fast

NO

Are any of these signs and symptoms present?

- Vomiting, then abdominal pain, and profuse, watery diarrhea.
- Muscle aches, headaches, sore throat, and “pinkeye” with a discharge that is clear.
- High fever without a skin rash, but with any other symptom listed in this question.

YES



See Doctor

NO

Does a wound have increased redness, swelling, and/or pain? Does puss or other fluid drain from the wound?

YES



See Doctor

NO



Use Self-Care

## Self-Care / Prevention

- Practice good hygiene.
- Keep wounds clean. See your doctor for signs of an infection (increased redness, swelling, and/or pain, pus, and/or fever).
- Don't use tampons if you've had TSS in the past.
- Change tampons and sanitary pads every 4 to 6 hours or more often. When you can, use sanitary napkins instead of tampons. Alternate tampons with sanitary pads or mini-pads during a menstrual period. Lubricate the tampon applicator with a water-soluble (nongreasy) lubricant, like K-Y Jelly®, before insertion.

*Flowchart continued in next column*