

# AFTER MENINGITIS

Recovery following meningitis  
or meningococcal septicaemia



| [www.meningitis.org.nz](http://www.meningitis.org.nz) | [info@meningitis.org.nz](mailto:info@meningitis.org.nz)



**MENINGITIS  
FOUNDATION**  
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

“  
Connecting with the  
Meningitis Foundation  
when I left the hospital  
was invaluable  
”

## RETURNING HOME AFTER HOSPITALISATION WITH MENINGITIS

After receiving expert care in hospital, you can understandably feel anxious about returning home.

Meningitis\* is a life-changing disease and can affect anyone at any time. At The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand we understand that while most people are pleased to be recovering at home, it can be an uncertain and worrying time.

Depending on the cause and severity of the illness, time spent in hospital varies. For some people it can be a few days, for others it can be weeks or even months. Sometimes a diagnosis of viral meningitis can mean there is no admission to hospital at all.

This leaflet provides general information about what to expect when leaving hospital or recovering at home. For more information about meningitis, please email us at [info@meningitis.org.nz](mailto:info@meningitis.org.nz) or refer to our website [www.meningitis.org.nz](http://www.meningitis.org.nz)

Most people who have bacterial or viral meningitis do make a good recovery, but some will suffer physical and emotional after-effects that can change their lives forever. Serious and potential long-term after-effects are usually identified while the person is still in hospital and can include hearing loss, acquired brain injury, skin damage and limb loss. In these cases, long-term treatment, follow-up and support should be made clear and discussed before leaving hospital. Many people who are left with long-term after-effects experience mental health difficulties including anxiety and depression.

Even for those without long-term complications, the recovery process following viral or bacterial meningitis can be slow. Headaches, fatigue and memory loss can be quite common. While they usually reduce over time, they can have a huge impact on daily life. It is not uncommon for people to experience emotional difficulties following meningitis as the impact of the disease can be overwhelming and stressful.

\*Meningitis is used to describe meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia



## FOLLOW-UP CARE

Hearing loss is a common after-effect following bacterial meningitis. All children under the age of 16 who have had bacterial meningitis should have a hearing test as soon as possible, preferably before leaving hospital or within four weeks of being well enough to test. If you are concerned that your hearing has been affected by meningitis, and are over 16, we recommend that you request a hearing test. Some levels of hearing loss may not be obvious but can have an impact.

Everyone should also have a follow-up appointment within 4-6 weeks of leaving hospital. This visit provides an opportunity to discuss the recovery process and any complications causing concern. The doctor will also look for any signs of after-effects that may need further follow-up.

If these appointments have not been arranged by the hospital, ask your GP to arrange them for you.

Sometimes it's only when trying to get back to everyday activities that it becomes apparent that life is not the same.

If you are concerned about your recovery or possible complications, speak to your GP or ask to be referred back to the hospital where you received your care.

More information about the after-effects of meningitis is available on our website

[www.meningitis.org.nz](http://www.meningitis.org.nz)



Image photo supplied by Meningitis Now



# RECOVERING AFTER MENINGITIS

## Recovery in babies and children

It can often take many months for babies and children to recover from meningitis, although some can be back to their normal activities within weeks. Children recovering from such a serious illness can be weak and tire more easily, but also have difficulty sleeping. They can also, depending on their age, experience behavioural problems such as temper tantrums, clinginess, bed wetting, mood swings, aggression and restlessness. It is not always possible to be sure if very young babies have after-effects when leaving hospital, as they are yet to reach development milestones.

For children and young people, returning to education is a big goal. This can be a difficult time, trying to catch up on work missed and seeing friends again. Even with a good recovery, problems can occur as children grow and their brains develop; meaning that it can take months – or even years – for complications to become apparent. Problems can sometimes show themselves at particular milestones, such as starting school, or moving from primary to intermediate to high school.

If you are concerned about the recovery of your baby or child, including follow up appointments, ongoing hospital or rehabilitation visits and after-effects, please speak with your GP.

## Recovery in adults

Many people still consider meningitis to be a childhood illness. Having meningitis as an adult can be difficult to come to terms with, particularly when others rely on you.

Even when there are no long-term after-effects identified, recovery can take weeks or months. As a result of meningitis, headaches, tiredness, aching joints, memory problems and emotional difficulties are just some of the after-effects you might experience. These may be short-term, but for some can be permanent.

Getting back to work can be a huge pressure, keeping employers happy and money coming into the household. You should listen to your body and try not to rush back. Most people find a gradual return allows them and their employer time to adjust.



Sara still experiences some after-effects but leads a happy and fulfilling life. **Photo credit** Levien & Lens Photography





## SUPPORT FOR YOU

We help and support people every year throughout New Zealand; answering questions, providing information and offering emotional support. We recognise that each person's experience differs greatly, so finding the right help and support when you need it is vital.

We know that the impact of meningitis can be complex, frightening and leave you feeling alone and unsupported. If you are recovering from meningitis and want to know more about the support we offer, please contact us [info@meningitis.org.nz](mailto:info@meningitis.org.nz)

We will follow up via email and can arrange to call you at a time that suits. This may be enough to put you on the right track to recovery. If further support is required we can put you in touch with others who have had a meningitis experience.

Further information about the Meningitis Foundation can be found on our website [www.meningitis.org.nz](http://www.meningitis.org.nz)

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand strives to achieve a world without meningitis by raising awareness of the symptoms of meningitis and advocating for funding for vaccines.

We couldn't do this without your invaluable support, determined spirit and dedication. Here's how you can help:

### **Become a volunteer**

If you have some spare time or energy, there are many ways you can help us reach more people and raise awareness of meningitis.

### **Share your experience**

Sharing your experience of meningitis can empower others to ask for the information and support they need to help with their own recovery.

### **Raise some money**

Organise a charity event or simply host afternoon tea with friends – there are so many ways you can raise money and have fun doing it.

### **Make a donation**

By giving a single donation, setting up a direct debit or leaving a legacy, you can help make a real difference.

