

# Postural Hypotension

Information for patients, relatives and carers

This leaflet explains what happens when you have a sudden drop in blood pressure when changing position and offers guidance on how to prevent and manage symptoms.

① For more information, please contact:

The department or ward where  
you have been receiving treatment  
If you do not have a direct number,  
please phone 01904 631313  
and ask for the department or ward

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## **What is postural hypotension?**

Postural hypotension is a sudden drop in blood pressure that can happen when changing position particularly from lying to sitting or from sitting to standing. It is also known as orthostatic hypotension.

- Postural means a change in position
- Hypotension is a fall in blood pressure to a low level.

# What are the symptoms of postural hypotension?

A fall in blood pressure leads to a reduced blood flow to your muscles, brain and other organs in your body. This can cause a variety of symptoms including:

- A feeling of dizziness and becoming light-headed that can cause you to fall.
- Changes in your vision such as blurred, greying or blacking vision.
- Feeling vague or muddled.
- Fainting, which might be referred to as a blackout or a sudden loss of consciousness.
- Feeling weak and tired.
- Pain across the back of the shoulders and neck.
- Pain in the lower back and buttocks.
- Angina type chest pain.
- Feeling sick, hot and clammy.

Any of these symptoms can happen and they can be different from one person to another.

# **What can make the symptoms worse?**

## **Bed rest**

If you have to stay in bed a long time because of an illness, you may become weak. When you try to stand up, you may experience the symptoms of postural hypotension.

## **Medication**

Some medicines can affect your blood pressure. Always read the information leaflets that come with your medicine. Your doctor or pharmacist might suggest that you spread medicines for blood pressure through the day. Ask them if your blood pressure can be affected by any new medications and talk through any worries you might have.

## **Dehydration**

If you have not had enough fluids to drink or if you sweat a lot, you might become dehydrated. This can also happen if you had a loss of blood or have had severe diarrhoea and vomiting.

## **Over-heating**

You can over-heat if the weather is very hot or you had had a hot bath or been in a very hot room. Being over-heated can give you symptoms of postural hypotension.

## **Anxiety and panic**

If you are very anxious or even panicky, your breathing pattern might change and this can give you symptoms.

## **Illnesses**

A common cold, flu or infections can affect your blood pressure.

## **Straining**

Stretching to reach something on a high shelf, heavy lifting or straining on the toilet if you are constipated, can all affect your blood pressure.

Sometimes, there are no obvious causes of this condition. It is more common in the elderly or in people with conditions such as **Diabetes** or **Parkinson's Disease**.

## **When are the symptoms likely to happen?**

They are most likely to happen when there is an extra demand for the blood circulating round your body.

### **Moving**

Symptoms most often happen when sitting up or standing up suddenly.

### **In the morning**

Blood pressure is naturally lower first thing in the morning following sleep, so getting out of bed can be a problem if you move too fast.

### **Food and Drink**

Your body has an extra need for blood after a meal to help you digest your food. Sugary food and alcoholic drinks have the same effect.

### **Exercise**

Housework, gardening, walking and other exercises, especially when on your feet, will need extra blood to move your muscles.

# How can you manage the symptoms?

There are many simple things you can do to avoid or manage symptoms of postural hypotension.

- **Go slow.** You may be able to reduce the dizziness and light-headedness that occurs by taking it slowly when you move from a lying to a standing position.

When getting out of bed, breathe deeply for a few minutes. Slowly sit up and then stand. Stay still for a few moments before starting to move around.

- **Have plenty of fluids.** Keeping yourself hydrated helps to prevent the symptoms of low blood pressure. Try to drink between six and eight glasses of fluid each day. Drink a large glass of water before getting out of bed in the morning.
- **Exercise your calf muscles** before sitting up and getting out of bed. Sit on the edge of your bed for a minute before standing. You can flex your ankles up and down and do gentle marching movements to stimulate your circulation.

- **Avoid bending** at the waist or **stretching up**. If you drop something on the floor, squat with your knees to recover it.
- **Avoid standing for long periods of time**. Sit down to do jobs like getting dressed, showering or preparing vegetables.
- **Prevent constipation** by eating foods that are high in fibre. Aim to eat at least five fruits or vegetables every day.

## What should you do if you experience symptoms?

The symptoms of postural hypotension are a warning that your blood pressure is too low. The only way to improve your blood pressure is to:

- **Stop** what you are doing.
- **Sit** down.
- **Drink** some water.
- **Think** about what might have caused your symptoms.

If you experience frequent symptoms, contact your doctor for further advice. Your blood pressure might need to be monitored when lying or standing, or your medicines might need to be reviewed. Do not stop taking any medication without discussing it with your doctor first.



## **What treatments are available?**

When the reason for the symptoms has been found and treated, further treatment is not usually needed.

Getting into a routine of regular simple exercises can be helpful.

Some people find elastic stockings helpful but these must be prescribed by your doctor. There are some medical conditions which may be made worse by wearing elastic stockings.

For further information or advice, or if you are worried about the risk of falling, please speak to your doctor or other health professional.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Patient Safety Manager, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 721549.

## **Teaching, Training and Research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.



# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供 , 電  
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