

Falls Clinic, Community
Rehabilitation Centre,
Kirklandside Hospital



Postural (Orthostatic) Hypotension

Information for you



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What is Postural Hypotension?

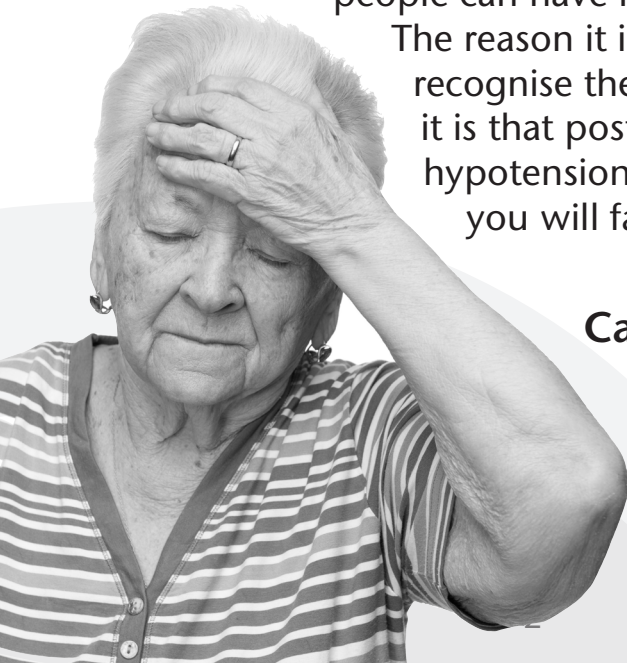
Your body has a network of blood vessels – veins, arteries and capillaries. The heart pumps blood through your arteries and then around your body. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries.

Postural (orthostatic) hypotension means that your blood pressure falls when you rise quickly – either from sitting or lying down or standing from sitting. It can also happen if you have been sitting or standing for a longer period of time.

Many older people have this problem when getting up. The drop in blood pressure can cause a number of symptoms. It is important to note that some

people can have it without symptoms.

The reason it is important to recognise the problem and treat it is that postural (orthostatic) hypotension increases the risk that you will fall.



Causes

There are several causes for postural hypotension. Postural

hypotension is more common in older people, especially in people with conditions such as Diabetes and Parkinson's Disease, however it can occur in almost anyone.

It can be caused by:

- Not drinking enough fluids or being dehydrated
- Overheating – after a hot bath, being in a hot room or on a sunny day
- Illness like cold or infections
- Anxiety or panic – this can cause you to change your normal breathing pattern
- Getting up and about after a prolonged period of bed rest
- Certain medicines

Symptoms

- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded particularly on standing up
- A feeling that you may faint
- Feeling confused or muddled
- Change in your vision such as blurring, greying or blackening of vision

- Weakness and fatigue
- Chest pain

These symptoms can vary from person to person

When are the symptoms most likely to happen

When there is an increased demand for the blood circulating in the body, for example:

- Moving – standing or sitting up suddenly
- In the morning – blood pressure is naturally lower in the morning
- During exercise – exercise and activity of any kind (including housework) increases the demand for blood for the muscles
- After meals – blood is needed by the digestive system, particularly after a large meal or after eating or drinking sugary food or alcohol
- Straining – if you are constipated or are having difficulty passing urine.

How to reduce symptoms

“Slow and Go” Rule

- Sit on the side of the bed or chair with your feet hanging down
- Point and relax your toes 10 times or rock your feet from heels to toes
- Stand up and count to 10
- Start walking. Remember to use your walking aid if you have one.

Remember to follow this rule if getting up to the toilet overnight and if sitting still for more than 15 minutes.

Other ways to help reduce symptoms

- Increase how much you drink, aim to drink 2 litres a day, preferably water. Take a glass of water with you to bed at night and drink it when you wake up, before you stand up for the first time
- Have a cup of tea or coffee before getting out of bed
- Raise the head of your bed – our occupational therapists will help with this if it is necessary

- Wear support stockings
- Avoid excessive alcohol
- Avoid large meals – eat small amounts often
- The doctor may reduce, change or stop any medicines you might be taking to try and limit the fall in your blood pressure for example, medicines for high blood pressure
- If none of the above help, you may be started on specific medicine treatment such as ‘fludrocortisone’

What to do when you have symptoms

Think of the symptoms as a warning that your blood pressure is too low. The way to improve your symptoms and maintain your safety is to:

- **STOP** what you are doing
- **SIT DOWN** or **LIE DOWN**
- **DRINK** a glass of water
- **THINK** about what could have triggered your symptoms

Useful links:

- Age UK – www.ageuk.org.uk
- British Heart Foundation – www.bhf.org.uk
- Syncope Trust and Reflex Anoxic Seizures
- (STARS) – www.stars.org.uk

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