



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

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:

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What is postural hypotension?

When we sit or lie down blood pools in our legs. If you have postural hypotension, the body is slower at pushing the blood back to your brain when you stand up.

This causes a drop in blood pressure that can make you dizzy or lightheaded. It can cause falls, or some people can black out. It is also known as orthostatic hypotension.

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

What are the symptoms of postural hypotension?

Some people with postural hypotension experience all of these symptoms some only have one or two. Please ask your health care professional if you have any new symptoms, they are not aware of. These symptoms include:

- 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.
- Heavy/ dull ache chest pain.
- Feeling sick, hot and clammy.

What can make the symptoms worse?

Bed rest

If you must stay in bed for 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. Ask your doctor or pharmacist 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. Being dehydrated makes you more likely to have postural hypotension. 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, after you had a hot bath, or been in a very hot room. For people going through the menopause may also experience overheating. 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 of postural hypotension.

Illnesses

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

When are the symptoms likely to happen?

Activities:

Symptoms are likely to happen first thing in the morning or after a meal. They can also be brought on by sugary food, or alcoholic drinks. You may also experience them when you are moving, especially when you are doing exercise like housework, gardening, walking or other activity you do when upright.

When you are on your feet, you need extra blood to move your muscles. It is also likely for you to experience postural hypotension when you stand up after long periods of inactivity, especially sitting.

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.

Medical conditions:

Sometimes, there are no obvious causes of postural hypotension. It is more common in older people or in people with conditions such as diabetes or Parkinson's disease.

How to manage your symptoms:

There are many simple things you can do to avoid or manage symptoms of postural hypotension. Do the following if you can:

- **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.

- **Stay hydrated.** This helps prevent the symptoms of low blood pressure. Try to drink between six and eight glasses of fluid (not alcohol) 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, bend your knees so you are squatting down to pick it up. If something is stored on a high shelf that needs you to reach up, ask someone else to help or where possible store things in easy reach.

- **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 e.g. wheatbix, brown rice and brown pasta. Aim to eat at least five portions of fruits or vegetables every day.

What to 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 talking to your GP first.

What treatments are available?

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

For some people medication is needed to be prescribed to prevent postural hypotension and your GP or consultant can prescribe these.

Getting into a routine of regular, simple exercises can be helpful. If you need support for this, please contact your GP for a physiotherapy referral.

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 Richards Advanced Clinical Specialist Falls & Frailty, telephone 01904721343 or email Emily.richards21@nhs.net

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 yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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