



# Syncope

## Patient information Leaflet

January 2020

## **Introduction**

Syncope (also called fainting or passing out) is the temporary loss of consciousness and posture due to a sudden drop in blood flow to the brain. It is a common problem.

There are two medical terms to describe simple faints or blackouts:

- Vasovagal syncope
- Orthostatic hypotension

These happen due to a brief reduction in the blood supply to the brain. They usually come on suddenly, last a short time and there is full recovery.

People can get preceding symptoms of feeling sick, being hot and sweaty and light headed. Some people may just pass out without warning. These are different from blackouts due to epilepsy, strokes and heart conditions.

## **Vasovagal Syncope (simple faints)**

Vasovagal syncope, the most common cause of fainting, is a temporary problem affecting the autonomic nervous system (the body's control system). It often starts with a rise in blood pressure and heart rate, followed by widening of the blood vessels and a drop in blood pressure, making you faint; however, you will usually recover quite quickly. They occur in both males and females, but are more common in girls.

Common things which might bring them on are:

- emotional distress (like seeing a needle), fear and pain
- after extreme exercise
- tight clothing such as tight collars
- being sick (vomiting) or having diarrhoea
- passing urine (micturition)
- long periods of standing

## **What are the risks?**

Simple faints (syncope) are usually harmless and in most cases many people do not report them. If it keeps happening, you can visit your doctor (GP).

The doctor will:

- ask you some questions about what was happening before and after your faint
- examine you
- see what other causes there might be.

In some people, they may want to arrange some blood tests. These will make sure there are no simple causes such as anaemia and low blood sugar.

For some people, the doctor will want to do a heart tracing (ECG).

## **How is it managed?**

It often helps if you understand what is causing you to faint, what you can do to avoid fainting and that the doctor has not found anything more serious.

You can try these simple things to help:

- Avoid things that are likely to cause a faint - eg, standing for a long time in the heat or having a long hot bath.
- Drink plenty of fluid.
- Try to sit or lie down as soon as there are warning symptoms.
- Try salty food more often if you are not advised against it by your doctor.

- In some patients, blood pressure drops only after eating a heavy meal. So eat more frequent, small meals with low sugar content.
- Do not skip breakfast.

### **Orthostatic hypotension:**

#### **What is it?**

Orthostatic hypotension - also called postural hypotension, is a form of low blood pressure that happens when you stand up from sitting or lying down. Orthostatic hypotension can make you feel dizzy or lightheaded, and maybe even faint.

#### **How is it managed?**

Your doctor will stop any tablets that might be making things worse.

You can do these simple things to help:

- drink plenty of fluid.
- wear support stockings to reduce pooling of blood in your legs
- take care when getting up – when you have been lying down sit on the edge of the bed for 30 seconds, then stand and wait for 30 seconds before moving on. When you have been seated for a while, stand and wait 30 seconds before moving on.

#### **If you think you are about to faint**

Take action at the first warning signs of fainting:

- lie down flat with the legs up on a chair or
- against a wall or sit down with the head between the knees.
- squatting down on the heels or rocking back and forth on your heels, can be very helpful and is less noticeable in public.

These techniques help move blood that has pooled in the limbs, and helps get more blood back up to the brain. When you are feeling better, get up carefully. If symptoms return, go back into the positions above.

Further useful information can be found at:

[www.stars.org.uk/patient-info](http://www.stars.org.uk/patient-info)

If you have any questions you want to ask, you can use this space below to remind you

If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

If you require an interpreter, please ask an appropriate person to contact our central booking office between Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm on 0161 922 6991 to arrange this for you.

**語言 翻譯及病者支持服務 (LIPS):**

如果閣下需要翻譯員在您的預約當日幫助您的話 請找一名合適的家庭成員 0161 922 6991 聯絡本中央預約辦事處來您您安排 我們的辦公時間是星期一至星期五 上午 8 時至下午 5 時

**Językowo Tłumaczeniowa Usługa Pomocy dla Pacjenta ( Language, Interpretation and Patient Support Service LIPS):**

Jeśli potrzebujesz pomocy tłumacza w trakcie swojej wizyty, proszę poprosić odpowiedniego członka rodziny o skontaktowanie się z Centralnym Biurem Zamówień (Central Booking Office), w celu zorganizowania tłumacza pomiędzy poniedziałkiem a piątkiem w godzinach od 08:00 - 17:00 pod numerem 0161 922 6991.

لینگویج، انٹریپریٹیشن اینڈ پیسٹنٹ سپورٹ سروس (Lips)

اگر آپ کو اپنی اپائنٹمنٹ کے لئے مترجم کی مدد کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ مہربانی اپنے خاندان کے کسی موزوں فرد سے کہیں کہ وہ ہمارے سنٹرل بکنگ آفس سے پیر سے جمعہ 8.00 بجے صبح سے 5.00 بجے شام کے دوران 01619226991 پر فون کر کے اس کا بندوبست کریں۔

Document control information

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