

PATIENT INFORMATION

Vasovagal Syncope

This leaflet gives you general advice about vasovagal syncope (fainting). It does not replace advice from a healthcare professional.

What is Vasovagal Syncope?

Vasovagal syncope (pronounced sin-co-pee) is the medical term for a brief loss of consciousness. About 40% of people faint at some time in their life, so vasovagal syncope is called the 'common faint'.

What makes you faint?

Fainting occurs when your blood pressure drops (hypotension). Your heart rate may also drop, or pause, for a short time.

You may feel dizzy, sweaty or sick, and have blurred vision. Sounds can also become distant, and you look pale.

Common causes include:

- ❖ Seeing blood or having an injection.
- ❖ Standing still or sitting in one position for a long time.
- ❖ Stressful or emotional situations.
- ❖ Being in a warm environment.
- ❖ Not eating or drinking enough.
- ❖ Diarrhoea, vomiting, an infection or flu.

If you feel faint - what to do?

As soon as you feel your usual symptoms coming on, act quickly:

- ❖ Sit or lie down, if you can. Rest your legs on a pillow or chair, so they are higher than your body. When you feel better, get up slowly and carefully. If you still feel faint, sit or lie down again.
- ❖ Squeeze your muscles tightly, and then relax. You can squeeze your arm, leg, stomach and buttock muscles. Keep squeezing till your symptoms go away. These are called counter-pressure exercises and can increase blood flow around your body and raise your blood pressure to prevent a faint. You can do these exercises standing, sitting or lying down.

Avoid fainting

- ❖ Keep well hydrated. Try to drink 2-3 litres of water a day. If you are unwell it is very important to drink enough fluids.
- ❖ Avoid standing up for long periods of time: for example, on public transport, in queues or at events.
- ❖ Avoid hot or warm areas.
- ❖ Limit your caffeine intake to 3-4 cups a day (this includes coffee, tea, cola drinks and most energy drinks).
- ❖ Eat regular meals, it is important to eat a good breakfast. Avoid large rich meals, especially with alcohol.
- ❖ Monitor your alcohol intake - even in small quantities, alcohol can dehydrate your body and increase your symptoms.
- ❖ Exercise regularly. Regular exercise will improve your circulation and help maintain your blood pressure.
- ❖ Increase your blood pressure using counter pressure exercises, explained above.
- ❖ Wear leg support tights or stockings (full length, class two) during the day, but remove them before bed. Support tights prevent blood from pooling in your legs.
- ❖ Stop smoking. Smoking increases your risk of developing many conditions and also causes permanent damage to your circulation system.
- ❖ Get out of bed slowly in the morning, especially if you have low blood pressure. Sit on the side of the bed for 20-30 seconds to let your blood pressure adjust.
- ❖ Increase your salt intake (only after discussion with your Doctor, and never if treated for high blood pressure).

How family, friends and carers can help?

- ❖ If you faint, family and friends can help you to lie down and raise your legs slightly, with a pillow or chair.
- ❖ They can also keep you safe, for example, by moving you away from a hot radiator, or removing hot drinks.
- ❖ Carry out simple first aid checks - Airway, Breathing, and Circulation.
- ❖ In case of an emergency, they should call 999 if you do not recover as usual.

Recovering from a faint

- ❖ Recovery is normally quick.
- ❖ You may feel weak, sick, tired or disorientated.
- ❖ Stay sitting or lying down for 10-20 minutes.

More information

- ❖ STARS (Syncope Trust and Reflex anoxic Seizures) www.stars.org.uk provides information for anyone experiencing unexplained loss of consciousness

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.