

Postural Hypotension

Information for Patients

What is postural hypotension?

Postural hypotension is a condition that results in a fall (drop) in blood pressure when changing position (posture) from lying or sitting, to standing. The fall in blood pressure reduces the blood supply to your brain, muscles and organs, and can lead to a range of symptoms.

Postural hypotension is linked to a number of medical conditions and can also be made worse by certain medications. It is very common in older patients who are on treatment or medication for high blood pressure, as well as in those with diabetes or Parkinson's Disease. It can also occur after prolonged periods of bed rest.

Although some of the symptoms of postural hypotension can be alarming, it is generally not a serious condition, and there are some simple measures that can reduce the symptoms experienced.

What are the symptoms?

Many people with postural hypotension have no symptoms at all, but others experience one, or some, of the following:

- Dizziness or light headedness
- Faints
- Falls
- Blurred or altered vision
- Confusion
- Nausea or sweating
- Weakness or fatigue.

Less common symptoms include:

- Feeling a strong need to sit or lie down
- Pain or pressure across the back of your shoulders or neck
- Pain or pressure in your lower back and buttocks.

When are symptoms likely to occur?

- When you move from lying to sitting, or from sitting to standing
- In the morning, when your blood pressure tends to be lower
- In a warm or hot environment
- After a hot bath or shower
- When you feel dehydrated or unwell (especially if you have sickness and diarrhoea).

Symptoms can also occur:

- After a large meal
- After drinking alcohol
- During exercise, or when you have been standing still for longer periods
- Straining on the toilet
- When you feel anxious, or when you feel panicked.

What can I do to control my symptoms?

Take your time- move slowly when sitting or standing up

Before getting out of bed:

- Move your feet and legs a few times before rising
- Sit on the edge of the bed for 1-2 minutes before standing
- Stand still for 1-2 minutes before trying to walk
- Sit down again if you develop any symptoms.

Stay well hydrated:

- Drink a large glass of cold water before getting out of bed
- Aim to drink at least 1.5 litres (3 pints) of fluid per day
- Increase this to 2 litres (3 and a half pints) a day if the weather is warm/hot, or if you are unwell
- Fluids can include water, juice, milk, and coffee.

Other suggestions:

1. If you have to walk for long periods, plan to have regular rests
2. If you have to stand for long periods, do some muscle tensing exercises (please see below).

Things to avoid:

- Sudden changes in posture
- Sitting or standing for long periods
- Very hot baths or showers
- Constipation
- Large meals (it is better to have small meals, more frequently)
- Alcohol.

What should I do if I feel symptoms coming on?

- **Stop** what you are doing
- Sit or lie down, if you can
- Do some simple arm or leg **muscle tensing exercises**:
 1. Firmly clench your buttocks and straighten your legs for a few seconds at a time
 2. Make tight fists with your hands for a few seconds at a time
 3. If you have a walking or shopping trolley, grip the handle firmly for a few seconds at a time
 4. Rock forward and back on the balls of your feet.

What will your doctor do to help?

Your doctor will review your medications to see if any of them are contributing to the postural blood pressure drop and, if possible, reduce the dose or stop them altogether. In some cases, your doctor may prescribe a medication to raise your blood pressure.

Interpretation and Translation

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.