

## Postural hypotension

### What is it and how to manage it

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#### Introduction

We hope this guide will answer your questions about postural hypotension. Please ask your nurse if you require further information.

#### What is postural hypotension?

Postural hypotension, also known as orthostatic hypotension, is when your blood pressure drops when you stand up from sitting or lying down. It is a common problem affecting older people but it can affect younger people too. Please be reassured this is not a life-threatening condition.

#### What are the symptoms?

A drop in blood pressure when changing positions can result in temporarily decreased blood flow to your brain. This can lead to symptoms such as dizziness, light headedness, fainting, general weakness, blurred vision, and blackouts. These symptoms can be debilitating and may result in falls and injuries especially after standing up quickly from a lying or sitting position. Some people may not develop any symptoms despite their blood pressure dropping.

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## Diagnosing postural hypotension

If you have experienced any of the symptoms listed above, a healthcare professional will measure your blood pressure while you are lying in bed and then again within 3 minutes of you standing up. If your blood pressure drops significantly during this test, it means you are experiencing postural hypotension

### What causes postural hypotension and when might symptoms happen?

There are several potential causes, and it can be related to a combination of factors, including:

- Not drinking enough fluids or being dehydrated
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Illness, such as a cold or infection
- Surgery
  - Overheating – from a hot bath, being in a hot room, or outside on a sunny day
- Anxiety, panic, or emotional distress
- Anaemia
- Eating a large meal
- Standing or sitting up quickly from lying down; particularly first thing in the morning, or after a period of prolonged bed rest

Certain medications – including ‘water tablets’ (diuretics), blood pressure lowering tablets (anti-hypertensives), or medications for specific conditions.

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- Specific medical conditions such as Parkinson’s disease, dementia, high blood pressure, and diabetes
    - Prolonged bed rest or reduced mobility

### What should you do if you experience symptoms?

- Stop what you are doing
- Sit or lay down until your symptoms have cleared
- Drink a glass of water
- If you experience symptoms of postural hypotension frequently, you should contact your GP practice for further advice

### How to treat postural hypotension

The most effective treatment is to understand the causes, how to manage them, and to introduce some simple lifestyle measures listed below:

- On waking or getting up to use the toilet in the night, get out of bed slowly. Sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes, and then stand up. If symptoms occur, pause until they have completely cleared, or return to sitting or lying down if required
- Exercise gently before getting up – try marching your feet up and down and clench and unclench your calf muscles
- Make sure you have something to hold on to when you stand up – including your walking aid if you have one
- Do not walk if you feel dizzy

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- Avoid alcohol but maintain good fluid intake. Unless you have been told by a medical professional to limit your fluid intake, aim to drink 2 litres (4 pints) of fluid throughout the day
  - Avoid eating large meals. Eat little and often
  - Compression stockings might help. You can discuss appropriate stockings with your doctor or nurse
  - Avoid taking very hot baths
  - Avoid becoming constipated and ensure that your diet is high in fibre
- Medications
- Tell your doctor if you think any new medications might be causing symptoms of postural hypotension.
  - If appropriate, your doctor will consider if any of your existing medications will need to be reduced or stopped. If symptoms persist, you may be offered medication to help raise your blood pressure

If you would like to give feedback on your care, please contact our patient experience team on [paht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:paht.pals@nhs.net) or 01279 827211.

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