

FAINTING

(Syncope)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A sudden, temporary loss of consciousness due to a decrease in the supply of blood and oxygen to the brain. Fainting may be a symptom of a health problem or a one-time event. Syncope is the medical term for fainting.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Paleness and sweating.
- Sudden light-headedness.
- General weakness, followed by a fall.
- Blurred vision (sometimes).
- Nausea (sometimes).
- Rapid heartbeat and rapid breathing.

CAUSES

- The heart can not pump enough blood for the body to function properly. This occurs with heart disease and blood vessel disorders.
- The blood volume (amount of blood) is low. This can be due to bleeding or dehydration.
- Stimulation of the vagus nerve (in the neck, chest, and intestine) may slow the heart. This can happen with pain, fear, distress, vomiting, a large bowel movement, and even urinating can stimulate the nerve.
- Blood flow back to the heart is reduced. This occurs with straining when coughing, passing a stool, or in older men when trying to urinate (called micturition).
- Standing up or sitting down too quickly causes a sudden change in blood pressure. This is called orthostatic hypotension. Standing for long periods on a hot day can cause a similar problem due to lack of leg muscle use.
- Very rapid breathing or hyperventilating due to anxiety. Too much carbon dioxide is exhaled which then causes blood vessels in the brain to narrow.
- Other causes may be due to stroke, anemia, low blood sugar, lung problems, and others.
- In some cases, the cause of fainting is unknown.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Heart disease or certain other chronic disorders.
- Certain drugs, such as those that slow the heartbeat.
- Being elderly.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Often, fainting can not be prevented. If you feel faint, lie down with feet up or sit in a chair and bend over.
- Avoid the problems that can cause fainting if possible. Try not to get overly anxious. Get treatment for any medical disorder and avoid constipation. Men can urinate while sitting down if standing causes fainting. Avoid sudden changes in physical activity, such as when getting up from a chair or bed (move slowly).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

A person will recover from simple fainting in 1 or 2 minutes. There are normally no long-term effects.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Injury while fainting, such as from a fall.
- Complications caused by a disorder that lead to the fainting.
- Recurrent fainting can have a major impact on a person's lifestyle. It may prevent driving a motor vehicle.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- See your health care provider after any fainting event. A physical exam may be done and questions asked about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may include an ECG (electrocardiogram). It measures the electrical activity of the heart. Other tests may be done depending on the results of the ECG, or if other health disorders are suspected.
- Sometimes, no treatment is needed. In other cases, treatment may be prescribed for a diagnosed problem. Rarely, a patient may need hospital care for a period.
- If you are subject to frequent fainting spells, avoid activities in which fainting may endanger your life or others. This includes climbing ladders, driving motor vehicles, or operating dangerous machinery. Take measures to make your home safe in case you fall during a fainting event.

MEDICATIONS

Drugs are usually not needed for fainting. They may be prescribed for a health problem that is diagnosed.

ACTIVITY

You can usually resume normal activities right away unless advised differently by your health care provider.

DIET

No special diet. Drink adequate fluids. Avoid alcohol.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has a fainting event even if it seems mild. Fainting may be a symptom of a disorder that requires treatment.

Special notes:

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