

# Postural Hypotension

## Information for Patients

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### What is postural hypotension?

Postural hypotension is a condition that results in a drop in blood pressure when changing position 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 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 the shoulders or neck
  - in the lower back and buttocks

## WHEN ARE SYMPTOMS LIKELY TO OCCUR?

- Movement from lying to sitting, or 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 dehydrated or unwell (especially sickness and diarrhoea)

Symptoms can also occur:

- After a large meal
- After drinking alcohol
- During exercise, or when standing still for longer periods
- Straining on the toilet
- When anxious, or feeling panic

## 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 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, tea and coffee

### **Other suggestions:**

1. If you have to walk for long periods, plan having a regular rest
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 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**:
  - Firmly clench your buttocks and straighten your legs for a few seconds at a time, **OR**
  - Make tight fists with your hands for a few seconds at a time, **OR**
  - If you have a walking or shopping trolley, grip the handle firmly for a few seconds at a time, **OR**
  - 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.