

Integrated Regional Falls Program



North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN

Low Blood Pressure (Orthostatic Hypotension)

What is Orthostatic Hypotension?

Orthostatic hypotension is a form of low blood pressure that occurs when you stand up from sitting or lying down. You feel dizzy or lightheaded, and maybe even faint.

Orthostatic hypotension is often mild, lasting a few seconds to a few minutes after standing and often doesn't need treatment. However, long-lasting orthostatic hypotension can be a sign of more serious problem. Talk to your health care provider if you frequently feel lightheaded when standing up or if you lose consciousness, even momentarily. The treatment for more severe cases of orthostatic hypotension depends on the cause.

While mild forms of orthostatic hypotension may be a nuisance, more serious complications are possible, especially in older adults. These complications include:

- **Falls** - Falling down as a result of near-fainting/fainting (syncope) is a common complication in people with orthostatic hypotension.
- **Stroke** - The swings in blood pressure when you stand and sit as a result of orthostatic hypotension can be a risk factor for stroke due to the reduced blood supply to the brain.
- **Cardiovascular diseases** - Orthostatic hypotension can be a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases and complications, such as chest pain, heart failure or heart rhythm problems.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Orthostatic Hypotension?

- Feeling lightheaded or dizzy after standing up
- Blurry vision
- Weakness
- Fainting (syncope)
- Confusion
- Nausea



What Causes Orthostatic Hypotension?

- **Changes in position** - Dizziness or light-headedness can happen when you stand after sitting for a long time, such as in a lecture or church. Gravity causes blood to pool in your legs. This decreases blood pressure because there's less blood circulating back to your heart to pump.
- **Dehydration** - Fever, vomiting, not drinking enough fluids, severe diarrhea and strenuous exercise with excessive sweating can all lead to dehydration. When you become dehydrated, your body loses blood volume.
- **Heart problems** - Some heart conditions that can lead to low blood pressure include extremely low heart rate, heart valve problems, heart attack and heart failure. These conditions may prevent your body from being able to respond rapidly enough to pump more blood when needed, such as when standing up. In addition, as the body ages, the ability to regulate blood pressure can be slowed; it may be harder for your heart to beat faster and compensate for drops in blood pressure.

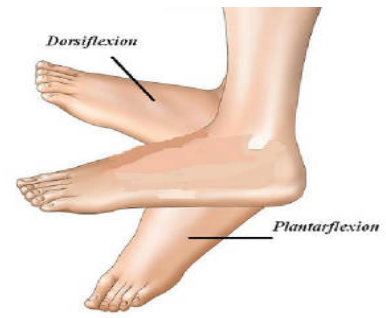
- **Endocrine problems** - Thyroid conditions, adrenal insufficiency (Addison's disease), low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) can trigger low blood pressure. Diabetes can also damage the nerves that help send signals regulating blood pressure.
- **Nervous system disorders** - Diseases such as Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia, can disrupt your body's normal blood pressure regulation system.
- **After eating meals** - Some people experience low blood pressure after eating meals (postprandial hypotension). This condition is more common in older adults.
- **Medications** - Certain medications have a greater risk of orthostatic hypotension such as; medications used to treat high blood pressure or heart disease, medications used to treat Parkinson's disease, certain antidepressants and antipsychotics, muscle relaxants, medications to treat erectile dysfunction and narcotics. Using medications that treat high blood pressure in combination with other prescription and over-the-counter medications may also cause low blood pressure.
- **Alcohol** - Drinking alcohol can increase your risk of orthostatic hypotension.

What is the Treatment for Orthostatic Hypotension?

The treatment for orthostatic hypotension depends on the underlying cause. If the cause is related to an underlying health problem such as, heart failure, your health care provider will need to address the underlying health problem, rather than the low blood pressure itself. Or when low blood pressure is caused by medications, treatment usually involves changing the dose of the medication or stopping it entirely. Again, this will need to be discussed with your health care provider.

Lifestyle changes used to treat Orthostatic Hypotension include:

- Rising slowly from a lying or sitting position- use the **“Slow and Go”** rule any time you have been lying or sitting more than 20 minutes.
 1. **Sit on the side of the bed/chair.**
 2. **Pull your toes towards your head 10 times.**
 3. **Stand up.**
 4. **Count to 10 before walking.**
- Crossing your legs while standing upright
- Elevating the head of your bed 5-20 degrees; this can help fight the effects of gravity
- Avoiding bending at the waist; squat to pick something up off the floor
- Moving your legs when standing; cross your thighs in a scissors fashion and squeeze, or put one foot on a ledge or chair and lean as far forward as possible. These maneuvers encourage blood to flow from your legs to your heart.
- Drinking enough fluids, such as water (consult your health care provider for correct amount)
- Drinking little to no alcohol
- Increasing the amount of salt in your diet (consult your health care provider before increasing your salt intake)
- Eating smaller meals. If your blood pressure drops after eating, your health care provider may recommend small, low-carbohydrate meals
- Using compression stockings may help reduce the pooling of blood in your legs and reduce the symptoms of orthostatic hypotension
- Reviewing your medications with your health care provider and/or pharmacist



References

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