Postural Hypotension
Patient Information Leaflet
What is postural hypotension?
Postural hypotension is a fall in blood pressure which often occurs when a person changes their body position (posture), typically from lying to standing or sometimes sitting. It is a common problem affecting older people but it can also affect younger people too. Postural Hypotension can result in a decreased blood flow to your brain, causing a sensation of dizziness or light headedness and sometimes falls or blackouts.

What causes postural hypotension?
There are several causes of postural hypotension. It can be due to several causes in one person. Postural hypotension is more common in older people, especially in people with conditions such as diabetes and Parkinsons disease however it can occur in almost anyone. It can be caused by:

- Not drinking enough fluids or being dehydrated
- Overheating – after a hot bath, being in a hot room or on a sunny day
- Illness like cold or infections
- Anxiety or panic – this can cause you to change your normal breathing pattern
- Anaemia
- Mobilising after a period of prolonged bed rest
- Certain medications – taking too many ‘water tablets’ (diuretics) causing you to become dry or dehydrated, having too much medication for high blood pressure (anti-hypertensives), or medication for specific diseases/conditions e.g. Parkinson’s Disease

What are the symptoms of postural hypotension?
A fall in blood pressure leads to a reduced blood supply to the brain and other organs and muscles which can cause a variety of symptoms including:

- Feeling dizzy or light headed particularly on standing up
- Feeling confused or muddled
- Losing consciousness with or without warning this is a ‘faint’ or a ‘blackout’
- Change in your vision such as blurring, greying or blackening vision
- Weakness and fatigue
- Pain across the back of your shoulders and neck
- Pain across your lower back and buttocks

These symptoms can vary from person to person.
When are the symptoms likely to happen?
When there is an increased demand for the blood circulating in the body, for example:

- Moving – standing or sitting up suddenly
- In the morning – blood pressure is naturally lower first thing in the morning
- During exercise – exercise and activity of any kind (including housework) increases the demand for blood for the muscles
- After meals – blood is needed by the digestive system, particularly after large meal or sugary food or alcohol
- Straining – if you are constipated or are having difficulty passing urine

What you can do to help reduce the symptoms?
Avoid becoming dehydrated and try to drink 3 ½ pints (2litres) of fluid, preferably water, every day. Drink a large glass of water before getting out of bed in the mornings. This may not be appropriate for patients with heart or kidney problems.
Avoid getting up quickly or hurrying.
Avoid standing/sitting still for long periods of time
Avoid bending at the waist or stretching up if possible. If you drop something on the floor, squat with your knees to recover it
Avoid excessive alcohol
Avoid large meals
Avoid overheating such as having very hot baths or getting over heated in a very warm room
Avoid becoming constipated and ensure that your diet is high in fibre

Do stand/get up slowly, especially when you first wake up or have sat down for a long period
Do plan your day ahead and sit down for tasks such as preparing meals/vegetables/getting dressed
Do eat little and often
Do reduce the amount of carbohydrates you eat at meal times
Do rise slowly when getting out of bed. Sit with your legs hanging down for a few minutes before standing. Make sure that your balance is steady before walking
Do try sleeping with your head raised 5 inches above the level of the mattress
Do try clenching and unclenching your calf muscles before standing/moving
Do ask you doctor or pharmacist if any new medication you are taking is likely to affect your blood pressure.
Do ask your doctor to assess your bone health as postural hypotension can make you more prone to falls and you may benefit from medication which can strengthen your bones
What should you do if you get symptoms?
Think of the symptoms as a warning that your blood pressure is too low. The way to improve your symptoms and maintain your safety is to:

- **STOP** what you are doing
- **SIT DOWN/LIE DOWN**
- **DRINK** a glass of water
- **THINK** about what could have triggered your symptoms

If you have frequent symptoms, you should contact your GP for further advice. This may include further investigations of your symptoms including medication review and lying/standing BP monitoring.

**DO NOT STOP TAKING ANY MEDICATION WITHOUT DISCUSSING THIS FIRST WITH YOUR DOCTOR**

**What treatments are available?**
Your doctor can:

- Review and if necessary try to limit the amount of blood pressure/heart medications
- Prescribe leg compression stockings if appropriate
- Prescribe tablets to increase your blood pressure and avoid salt loss, if appropriate.

Useful links:
Age UK – [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)
British Heart Foundation – [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)
Syncope Trust and Reflex Anoxic Seizures (STARS) – [www.stars.org.uk](http://www.stars.org.uk)

**Data Protection**
Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.
In order to assist us improve the services available your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews. Further information is available in the leaflet Disclosure of Confidential Information IL137, via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website or the PALS Service.

---

Information Leaflet: NoIL475  
Version: 1  
Title: Postural Hypotension – Patient Information Leaflet  
First Published: July 2014  
Review Date: July 2016  
Author: Karen Hunter  

**This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request**