Vasovagal Syncope

Vasovagal Syncope is a reflex where a sudden drop in blood pressure leads to less blood flow to the brain. You may faint (syncope) or feel dizzy when this happens. Repeated episodes of fainting can be treated with lifestyle behaviors, exercises and medicines that work to overcome the sudden drop in blood pressure. Talk with your doctor about the treatments best for you.

Lifestyle Behaviors

Diet and Nutrition

- Eat small meals during the day with high protein diet. Do not skip meals.
- If your doctor recommends sodium chloride tablets to add salt to your diet, take the tablet(s) as directed.
- Increase fluids to eight (8) 12-ounce glasses of water during the day. Fluids may also include sports drinks like Gatorade, or fruit and vegetable juices that have salt added.
- More salt and water may be needed when the weather is warm or if exercise is increased. These add to the loss of salt and water in the body.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco

Exercises

Regular exercise is important to help reduce excess blood in the lower legs and feet, and improve the flow of blood back to the heart.

- Get moderate regular aerobic exercise at least 3 days a week for 30 minutes.

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- Do regular exercises to strengthen lower leg muscles.
- Your doctor may recommend foot exercises. Do exercises as directed.
- Your doctor may recommend wearing compression stockings, such as when exercising or when legs swell.
- Tense legs when standing to help push blood out of the lower body.

**Medicines**
Medicines may also be used to reduce signs of syncope:

**Beta-Blockers**
These are medicines that block adrenaline in the body. It is the adrenaline that leads to the abnormal reflex which causes blood pressure to drop.

**Blood Vessel Constrictors**
These medicines make blood vessels smaller, so that pressure in blood vessels is increased. They help to avoid sudden drops in blood pressure.

**Hypotension Treatment**
In cases of low blood pressure (hypotension), medicines are given so that the body holds on to water and salt. This raises the blood pressure to avoid signs of syncope. Fludrocortisone (Florinef) is a type of corticosteroid used to help retain sodium and water in blood vessels.

**Antidepressants or Anti-Anxiety**
Depression or anxiety medicines may be used to treat syncope. These medicines work with the brain so that brain signals do not allow the heart rate to slow down. As the heart slows, blood vessels become wider (dilate) which can lead to sudden drops in blood pressure.

**How to Reduce Signs of Syncope**
Awareness of what triggers fainting is also important. Some behaviors are more likely to lead to a sudden drop in blood pressure:

**When Standing or Sitting**
- Avoid standing for long amounts of time. When standing, bend knees slightly, move from side to side or sit down when signs start.
• Transition from sitting or lying down to standing position slowly. Avoid turning head quickly from side to side when standing. Make slow and deliberate movements.
• If sitting for long periods of time, cross legs and then gently squeeze muscles in the legs to raise blood pressure once in a while. Do this before standing.

If You Feel Faint
If signs of syncope begin try these behaviors:
• Sit down with legs crossed and squeeze leg muscles several times to raise your blood pressure. Bend over at the waist so that your head is between your knees.
• Lay down with legs raised in the air to push blood toward the brain

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.