

## **FAINTING (Vasovagal Syncope)**

### **What is vasovagal syncope?**

Vasovagal syncope occurs when you faint because your body overreacts to certain triggers, such as the sight of blood or extreme emotional distress. It may also be called neurocardiogenic syncope.

The vasovagal syncope trigger causes your heart rate and blood pressure to drop suddenly. That leads to reduced blood flow to your brain, causing you to briefly lose consciousness.

Vasovagal syncope is usually harmless and requires not treatment. But it's possible you may injure yourself during a vasovagal syncope episode. Your doctor may recommend tests to rule out more serious causes of fainting, such as heart disorders.

### **What causes vasovagal syncope?**

Fainting episodes occur when the part of your nervous system that regulates heart rate and blood pressure malfunctions in response to a trigger, such as the sight of blood. Your heart rate slows, and the blood vessels in your legs widen (dilate). This allows blood to pool in your legs, which lowers your blood pressure. Combined, the drop in blood pressure and slowed heart rate quickly reduce blood flow to your brain, and you faint.

Common triggers include:

- Standing for long periods of time
- Heat exposure
- Seeing blood
- Having blood drawn
- Fear of bodily injury
- Straining, such as to have a bowel movement

Before you faint, you may experience some of the following:

- Pale skin
- Lightheadedness
- Tunnel vision – your field of vision narrows so that you see only what's in front of you
- Nausea
- Feeling warm
- A cold, clammy sweat
- Yawning
- Blurred vision

During a vasovagal syncope episode, bystanders may notice:

- Jerky, abnormal movements
- A slow, weak pulse
- Dilated pupils

Recovery after your fainting episode generally begins in less than a minute. However, if you stand up too soon after fainting – within about 15 to 30 minutes – you're at risk of fainting again.

Diagnosing vasovagal syncope often involves ruling out other possible causes of your fainting — particularly heart-related problems. These tests may include:

- **Electrocardiogram.** This test records the electrical signals your heart produces. It can detect irregular heart rhythms and other cardiac problems. You may need to wear a portable monitor for at least a day or as long as a month.
- **Echocardiogram.** This test uses ultrasound imaging to view the heart and look for conditions, such as valve problems, that can cause fainting.
- **Exercise stress test.** This test studies heart rhythms during exercise. It's usually conducted while you walk or jog on a treadmill.
- **Blood tests.** Your doctor may look for conditions, such as anemia, that can cause or contribute to fainting spells.

### **How can I prevent a vasovagal syncope?**

You may not always be able to avoid a vasovagal syncope episode. If you feel like you might faint, lie down and lift your legs. This allows gravity to keep blood flowing to your brain. If you can't lie down, sit down and put your head between your knees until you feel better.

In most cases of vasovagal syncope, treatment is unnecessary. Your doctor may help you identify your fainting triggers and discuss ways you might avoid them.

Make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. If you have kidney, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase your fluid intake.