



GUIDE



What is postural hypotension?



The Ottawa Hospital | L'Hôpital
d'Ottawa



Disclaimer

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“I feel dizzy when I get up too quickly.”

When you stand up quickly and get a head rush or dizzy spell, you may have “postural hypotension,” also known as low blood pressure. With low blood pressure, your blood is not pumping as strongly as it should.

If your blood pressure drops enough to decrease the blood flow to your brain, you may feel these symptoms

- Dizzy
- Light-headed
- Faint, which may make you fall down
- Feel unsteady when you move around
- Sway when you stand up

How can I tell if I have low blood pressure?

Have your blood pressure taken 3 to 5 minutes after lying down. Take it again right away after you stand up, and take it again a few minutes later if you feel dizzy or light-headed. It’s important to take your blood pressure before and after standing up, to see if there is a sudden drop. Make sure to take your blood pressure regularly.

Who gets low blood pressure?

Anyone! But it tends to be more of a problem as you get older and get other chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease or neurological problems such as Parkinson’s disease.

What causes low blood pressure?

- Lower volume of blood (called “hypovolemia”)
 - Most common cause of low blood pressure
 - May be caused by:
 - some medicines, such as diuretics (water pills) or heart medicines
 - dehydration (haven’t had enough to drink)
 - spending a long time on bed rest
- Blood pressure medicine
- Leg swelling – when your blood collects in the large veins in your legs and body
- Blood vessels that don’t change fast enough when you move around. This is called a “decrease in autonomic reflex sensitivity” and it’s normal as you get older
- Neurological disorders

Postural Hypotension

Low blood pressure when you stand up

Ways to control low blood pressure:

- Change your habits:

1. Stand up slowly, in two stages:

To get out of bed:

- Sit on the side of the bed with your legs dangling for one minute.
- Stand slowly, holding onto the edge of the bed or a stable object for one minute.
- If you’re still dizzy, sit down again.

- To get up after sitting for a while:
- Pump your ankles up and down, or straighten your knees for a few minutes.
- Stand slowly, holding onto a stable object for one minute.
- If you're still dizzy, sit down again.

2. Never bend down all the way to the floor or stand up too quickly.

3. Be aware that the symptoms of low blood pressure are the worst:

- 30 to 60 minutes after a heavy meal. Try eating several small meals instead.
- One to two hours after taking blood pressure medicine.
- When you are dehydrated (haven't had enough to drink).
- Right after getting out of bed in the morning. Do things like shaving or blowing your hair dry at least an hour later.
- When you're getting hotter (from a hot shower or a hot day).

4. Don't do things that make you too hot or thirsty.

- Drink lots of fluids, but not drinks with alcohol
- Don't take hot baths. Make sure your bath water is just warm

5. Don't do things that make you hold your breath or bear down. Don't wear tight belts.

6. Stay active every day! Make sure you do light exercises, such as walking or leg strengthening. If you feel dizzy, sit down and rest.

What to do:

1. Have your family doctor measure your blood pressure when you're lying down and then standing.
2. Have all your medicines reviewed by your pharmacist or family doctor.
3. Your doctor may say you should wear waist-high elastic stockings that have a pressure of at least "30 mm Hg" (which means "30 millimetres of mercury"). You will need a prescription (an order from your doctor) for these stockings.
4. Your doctor may tell you to raise the head of your bed on blocks that are 8 to 10 inches (20 to 25 centimetres) high.
5. Your doctor may suggest you increase the salt in your diet.

It is important to discuss these suggestions with your family doctor.

Will it go away?

Low blood pressure (postural hypotension) is caused by many systems or medicines coming together. It might not go away completely. It's very important to do whatever you can to reduce the chances of falling and hurting yourself. Low blood pressure can be a sign of more serious illness or medicine effects, so you should always tell your doctor.

What to do next?

- Review this booklet with your family and family doctor
- Keep track of any dizzy spells after you go home from the hospital and tell your family doctor

