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Postural Hypotension (Low blood pressure from lying, sitting to standing up)

Some Practical advice

What is it?

Postural hypotension describes a drop in blood pressure sufficient to cause an inadequate blood supply to the brain.

How is it diagnosed?

It is diagnosed by a significant drop in blood pressure of 20mmHg systolic from lying to standing and/or 10mmHg diastolic.

The blood pressure is measured at intervals.

3-5 minutes quiet lying

1 minute after standing

3 minutes after standing

If the blood pressure continues to fall, and the patient is having symptoms of dizziness. Continue to measure at:

4 minutes standing

5 minutes standing. (Sometimes this can be very difficult for individual patients)

Ask the patient throughout the procedure if he/she experiences any dizziness or any symptoms.

What are the causes of Postural Hypotension?

It can occur at any age but is more common in older people. Common causes include:

- Certain medicines (diuretics, anti-hypertensive's)
- Prolonged bed rest
- Dehydration
- Rare condition of the nerves

What are the symptoms?

Patients may feel dizzy or faint causing them to fall or blackout when:

- Getting up quickly from a lying or sitting position.
- Standing still for any length of time.
- Getting out of a warm bath.
- Standing up after a big meal.

What should patients do if they fell dizzy on standing?

- Sit down immediately.
- If possible lie down flat.
- Put legs against a wall (above head height for a few minutes)
- When you fell well again, get up cautiously, However if you have further symptoms you may need to lie down again.
- Please contact your GP immediately if you continue to have symptoms.

How do patients prevent symptoms occurring?

- Take particular care in the morning. Blood pressure tends to be lowest in the morning and therefore symptoms are likely to be worst.
- Get out of bed in stages. Cross and uncross your legs firmly before sitting up and again before standing. Sit down again promptly if you have symptoms at any time.
- Avoid sudden changes in posture. Bending suddenly may make your symptoms worse. Try to pause between changes in posture.
- Avoid sitting/standing for long periods. If you do have to stand still, then rock forward on the balls of your feet to encourage blood flow.
- Raise the head of your bed with blocks. (An occupational therapist can advise on this).
- Wear support stockings or tights. This helps return blood to the heart. Take them off before going to bed.

What can I eat and drink to help my symptoms?

- Increase your fluid intake. You need to drink 3-4 pints (1.5-2 litres) of fluid per day, aiming to keep your urine clear all day.
- Eat small frequent meals. Some patients have large drops in blood pressure one or two hours after meals.
- Avoid excess alcohol. This will make your symptoms worse.
- Continue to use normal salt to maintain your sodium intake.

Medication:

There are medications available including Fludrocortisone but you will need to consult your doctor, as it is a prescription only drug.