

Syncope (Fainting)

Syncope

Syncope (sin-co-pee) is a temporary loss of consciousness. It is also known as fainting.

Warning signs may include weakness, nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, and abnormal heart rate.

It can happen suddenly, and without warning. Syncope is a common problem and can occur in healthy people.

Causes

Syncope is caused by a sudden decline in oxygen-rich blood to your brain. Possible causes of this decreased blood flow can include:

- abnormal heart rate or rhythm
- changes in blood pressure
- stress or anxiety
- pain
- standing for a long time
- getting up quickly from sitting or lying
- a heart disorder.

You can have an episode of syncope if you see blood or have a severe coughing spell. It can also be a side effect of a medicine or be a sign of a serious illness.

Treatment

If you feel faint, lie down and raise your legs. Even though recovery may be quick, you may need to lie down for 15 to 20 minutes.

Call your doctor for a physical exam to find the cause of the syncope.

If your syncope is possibly related to a heart problem, your doctor may want you to have special tests for your heart such as:

- an electrocardiogram (test for abnormal heart rhythm)
- Holter monitor (test for heart rate or rhythm changes during your normal activities)
- echocardiogram (test used to measure your heart's electrical activity or rhythm)
- tilt-table test (test to determine how changes in position affect your blood pressure, heart rate or heart rhythm).

Prevention

- Try not to stand for too long.
- Do not get up quickly from sitting or lying.
- Eat a healthful diet.
- Follow your doctor's directions for how much liquids you should drink each day.
- If your doctor gives you medicine to keep from fainting, follow the prescription.