



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Postural hypotension

Advice and management
strategies for patients, relatives
and carers

What is postural hypotension?

Postural hypotension, also called 'orthostatic hypotension' or 'postural drop', refers to a condition where a person's blood pressure drops when getting up from lying to sitting, or standing up from sitting. The symptoms can range from mild to severe and can have a significant impact on a person's function and quality of life.

What are the common symptoms?

- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Fainting or collapse
- Unsteadiness
- Changes in vision, such as blurring
- General weakness
- Blackouts

What causes postural hypotension?

Postural hypotension can be caused by many factors but common causes include:

- Certain medications (such as blood pressure tablets)
- Dehydration
- Prolonged bed rest
- Heart conditions
- Warm environments
- Damage to the nervous system (for example Parkinson's disease)

However, sometimes there is no easily addressed cause and the symptoms are caused by the body's normal coping mechanisms, with changes in posture and age.

How is postural hypotension diagnosed?

It can be diagnosed by checking your blood pressure when you have been lying down and then rechecking it when you have been standing for 1 minute and then 3 minutes and asking if you have any symptoms.

Management of postural hypotension

Often, postural hypotension can be successfully managed with some simple lifestyle changes, such as:

- Ensure you are well hydrated (aim to drink a minimum of 2 litres of water a day, unless advised otherwise by your doctor).
- Drink a glass of water before getting up in the morning.
- Move slowly between lying and sitting to allow your body to adjust before standing up.
- When standing up, stand still until any dizziness has settled – don't be tempted to move quickly, as this can leave you at high risk of falls.
- Raise the head of your bed slightly.
- A healthcare professional may suggest that you wear compression stockings or an abdominal binder, if appropriate.
- Your doctor may review your medications and stop any that are contributing to your postural hypotension.
- The following exercises may help you prepare your body before standing up.

Useful exercises

1. Ankle pumps

- Pull your toes up towards you and then point your toes away from you.
- Repeat this 10 times.
- Now draw 10 circles with your ankle and repeat this on the other foot.

2. Marching

- Complete while sitting in a chair or on the edge of the bed.
- March your knees up and down.
- Repeat 10 times.

3. Static gluts

- You can complete this while lying, sitting or standing.
- Squeeze your buttocks together.
- Hold for a count of 3, then relax.
- Repeat 10 times.

4. Leg extensions

- Complete while sitting in a chair or edge of bed.
- Straighten one of your leg, lifting it off the floor.
- Pull your toes up towards you.
- Hold for 3 seconds, then relax.
- Repeat 10 times on each leg.

5. Crossing legs

- Place your ankle on top of your knee.
- Hold for 3 seconds.
- Swap so that the other ankle is on top of the knee.
- Repeat 10 times.

If the above management tips are not effective, there are some medications that your doctor can prescribe; however, these are not appropriate for all patients with postural hypotension.

Further information

If you have any questions, you are encouraged to ask the nursing and medical staff providing care. For more information about postural hypotension, visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/low-blood-pressure-hypotension/

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Emergency Department (Frailty Team), July 2025

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