

How family, friends and carers can help

If you faint, family and friends can help you to lie down, and raise your legs slightly, with a pillow or chair. They can also keep you safe – for example, by moving you away from a hot radiator, or removing hot drinks. In case of an emergency, they should call 999 immediately.

Recovering from a faint

You may feel, weak, sick, tired or disoriented. Stay sitting or lying down for 10-20 minutes. Recovery from a faint is usually quick, so you should feel better soon.

More information

If you have any questions, please contact the syncope nurses.

Office: 020 7352 8121, ext 2505
(9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)

Mobile: 07794 249 542

Email: syncope@rbht.nhs.uk

Stars (Syncope Trust And Reflex anoxic Seizures) www.stars.org.uk provides information for anyone experiencing unexplained loss of consciousness.

If you have concerns about any aspect of the service you have received in hospital and feel unable to talk to those people responsible for your care, call PALS on 020 7349 7715 or e-mail pals@rbht.nhs.uk. This is a confidential service.



A lifetime of specialist care

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Royal Brompton Hospital
Vasovagal syncope
(common faints)



This leaflet gives you general information about vasovagal syncope (fainting). It does not replace advice from a healthcare professional. Please ask the syncope nurses if you have any questions.

What is vasovagal syncope?

Vasovagal syncope (pronounced sin-co-pee) is the medical term for a brief loss of consciousness (fainting). About 2 in 5 people (40%) faint at some time in their life, so vasovagal syncope is called the common faint.

What makes you faint?

Fainting occurs when your blood pressure drops (hypotension). Your heart rate may also drop, or pause, for a short time. You may feel dizzy, sweaty or sick, and have blurred vision. Sounds can also become distant, and you look pale. Common causes include:

- Standing still or sitting in one position for a long time
- Not eating or drinking enough
- Seeing blood or having an injection
- Stressful or emotional situations
- Extreme heat
- Diarrhoea, vomiting, an infection or flu

"I was relieved to hear what causes my faints; it wasn't as serious as I feared." *Holly*

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If you feel faint – what to do

If you feel you are about to faint, act quickly:

- Sit or lie down, if you can. Rest your legs on a pillow or chair, so they are slightly higher than your body. When you feel better, get up slowly and carefully. If you still feel faint, sit or lie down again.
- Squeeze your muscles tightly, and then relax. You can squeeze your arm, leg, stomach or buttock muscles. Keep squeezing and relaxing your muscles until your symptoms go away. These are called counter-pressure exercises and can increase blood flow around your body and raise blood pressure to prevent a faint. You can do these exercises standing, sitting or lying down. Your syncope nurse specialist will explain these exercises to you.

Avoiding fainting

To help stop feeling faint, you can:

- Keep well hydrated – try to drink two to three litres of water a day. If you are unwell, it is very important to drink enough fluids.
- Avoid standing up for long periods of time – for example, on public transport, in queues or at events.
- Avoid hot or warm areas.
- Limit your caffeine intake to no more than three cups a day – this

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includes coffee, tea, cola drinks and most energy drinks.

- Eat regular meals – it is important to eat a good breakfast. Avoid large, rich meals, especially with alcohol.
- Monitor your alcohol intake – even in small quantities, alcohol can dehydrate your body and increase your symptoms.
- Exercise regularly – regular exercise will improve your circulation and help maintain your blood pressure.
- Increase your blood pressure using counter pressure exercises, explained above.
- Wear leg-support tights or stockings (full length, class two) during the day – especially if you are standing for a long time, or on a long-haul flight.
- Stop smoking – smoking increases your risk of developing many conditions and also causes permanent damage to your circulation system.
- Get out of bed slowly in the morning, especially if you have low blood pressure. Sit on the side of the bed for 20-30 seconds to let your blood adjust.

"Now I know what to do when I feel faint, I've got my confidence back." *Vincenzo*

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