

# Orthostatic Hypotension

## What is orthostatic hypotension?

Orthostatic hypotension is an abnormal drop in blood pressure that happens when you stand.

## How does it occur?

Whenever you stand, the force of gravity pulls your blood downward. The blood tends to settle in your legs. Blood pressure starts to fall, reducing the blood supply to your brain. Normally, reflexes within the body compensate for this change. The heart beats faster, and the veins and arteries in the legs constrict, or squeeze. The squeezing prevents the pooling of blood in the legs and keeps blood pressure in the normal range.

In some people these normal reflexes diminish or fail, usually as they age. That's why orthostatic hypotension is most common in older people. In some people, the reflexes may stop working for no apparent reason.

Many drugs affect these reflexes and may cause orthostatic hypotension, particularly in the elderly. Diuretics, nitrates, blood pressure medicines, and antidepressants are all drugs that may cause a problem. Some diseases that damage nerves may cause orthostatic hypotension. Diabetes is the most common disease of this sort.

## What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms include:

- feeling light-headed, dizzy, or faint soon after arising
- sweating
- blurred vision
- passing out.

These symptoms are a direct result of lowered blood pressure and lack of enough blood flow to the brain. People who faint may fall and injure themselves.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will make a diagnosis based on your symptoms. He or she will then look for the cause.

## How is it treated?

If the cause is a medication, it can be adjusted or changed. If the cause can't be treated, the symptoms can be addressed.

First, stand up slowly. If you have been lying down, sit for awhile before standing. This allows sluggish reflexes to adjust. Support hose, which squeeze the legs and help prevent pooling of blood, help many people with this condition. In more severe situations medicine that causes fluid retention may help. Increasing your salt intake slightly or drinking more fluid may also help.

Check with your health care provider if you are concerned that any medicines you are taking may be making your orthostatic hypotension worse.

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