



Postural Hypotension

Postural Hypotension is a condition which results in a decrease in blood pressure, often caused when moving into a sitting/standing position.

Postural = change in position

Hypotension = fall in blood pressure to a low level

It occurs more commonly when a person first receives a spinal injury, especially when they are tired or after an illness. There is an increased tendency for postural hypotension if the level of the injury is at T-6 or above, but it can occur in all spinal cord injured individuals.

Postural Hypotension after a SCI occurs since the blood vessels do not increase in size, in response to lowered blood pressure, due to the altered function of the autonomic nervous system, this causes the blood to 'pool' in the pelvic region or legs while they are sitting or standing. Postural Hypotension usually occurs when they initially arise their head when getting up, when they are initially placed in the wheelchair or onto a tilt table.

Symptoms of Postural Hypotension (symptoms vary from person to person)

- Feeling dizzy and light headed
- Changes in vision, such as blurring, greying or blacking vision.
- Feeling vague or muddled
- Losing consciousness with or without warning, a 'blackout' or a 'faint'.
- Pain across the back of shoulders and neck.
- Pain in lower back and buttocks
- Angina type pain in chest.
- Weakness
- Fatigue

When are the symptoms likely to happen?

At anytime when there is an increased demand on the circulatory system:

- Moving: standing/sitting up suddenly
- In the morning when blood pressure is naturally lower.
- After meals: as blood is needed by the digestive system, in particular after big meals. Alcohol also has this effect.
- Straining on the toilet due to constipation, or difficulty passing urine.
- Dehydration
- Getting overheated, after hot bath or on a hot sunny day.
- Anxiety and panic.

- Illnesses such as cold or infections

What to do when the symptoms occur:

Think of the symptoms as a warning that the blood pressure is too low. The only way to improve your blood pressure is to:

- Stop what you are doing
- Sit down
- Have a drink of water

If fainting occurs:

- Lay down flat
- Check for breathing/circulation
- Raise legs

(There should be a prompt response, if not URGENT medical attention is required.)

Improving control of Postural Hypotension

- Keep head up in bed: sleep with head up at night helps to boost blood pressure when you get out of bed.
- Sit up slowly
- Get out of bed slowly
- Take any blood pressure medication before you get out of bed.
- Take time when changing position
- Eat small meals and snacks at regular intervals
- Use drinks containing caffeine.
- Have frequent rests
- Eat foods with fibre
- Drink 2 litres of fluid
- Keep cool, don't overheat
- Have a warm shower/bath instead of a hot one.

**If postural hypotension becomes suddenly worse it may be a sign that you have an infection, most commonly bladder or lungs. Medication is available that can help.