

Postural hypotension

This leaflet provides advice and management strategies for patients who have been diagnosed with postural hypotension.

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 age-related changes to the body's normal coping mechanisms.

How is postural hypotension diagnosed?

It can be diagnosed by checking your blood pressure when you have been lying down and then re-checking 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.

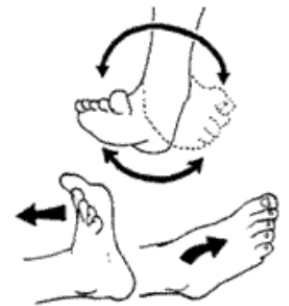
- Move slowly between lying and sitting to allow your body to adjust before standing up.
- When standing up, stand still until any dizziness has settled – don't be tempted to move quickly, as this can leave you at high risk of falls.
- Raise the head of your bed slightly.
- A healthcare professional 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.

Useful exercises

The following exercises may help you prepare your body before standing up. They are recommended to be completed before you stand up if you have been sitting or lying down for a prolonged period.

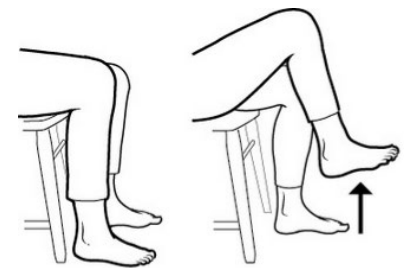
1. Ankle pumps

- 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.



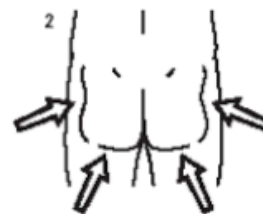
2. Marching

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



3. Static glutes

- 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 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.



Please note these exercises should be completed within a comfortable range of motion and should not cause pain or discomfort – if an exercise is too challenging or causes pain then please stop completing it immediately.

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, please ask your healthcare professional. For more information about postural hypotension, visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/low-blood-pressure-hypotension/

Friends and Family Test

Whatever your experience you can give feedback by answering the Friends & Family test question – ‘Overall, how was your experience of our service?’ – by going online www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm.

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)/Elderly Care Therapy Team, January 2023
Next review due: January 2025