

# Syncope

## What is syncope?

Syncope is:

- Also called fainting, blacking out or passing out;
- A sudden loss of consciousness, usually followed by a fall from a sitting or standing position;
- Common during childhood;
- Temporary;
- Followed by complete recovery, even without treatment (although the person may feel tired).

## What causes Syncope?

Syncope may happen when blood flow to the brain suddenly decreases. Blood carries oxygen to the brain. When blood flow to the brain decreases, the supply of oxygen to the brain decreases too. People often feel dizzy before fainting. It's common to feel dizzy without fainting (pre-syncope).

Decreases in blood flow to the brain (followed by syncope) can be caused by:

- A sudden drop in blood pressure caused by sudden position changes (like standing up too quickly after lying down);
- Very stressful or frightening experiences;
- Certain drugs or toxins;
- Passing urine, straining hard during bowel movements, or forceful coughing or sneezing;
- Breath holding spells;
- Rapid breathing (hyperventilation);
- Overheating, dehydration, heavy sweating, exhaustion, low blood sugar or pain;
- Neurologic (brain) problems like seizures, migraine headaches, head injuries, strokes, or inner ear problems (these are not common causes);
- Irregular, extremely slow or fast heart rhythms. While most people with syncope have normal hearts, some may have a problem with heart structure or rhythm (arrhythmias).

Some forms of syncope suggest a serious disorder. For example, syncope is more serious when it:

- Happens with exercise, activity, fright or anger;
- Is linked with palpitations, irregular heart beat or chest pain;
- Happens in people with family history of recurrent syncope or sudden death;
- Occurs without warning.

## Signs and symptoms of syncope

Your child or teen may have symptoms before fainting (prodrome) like:

- Feeling sick to the stomach and vomiting;
- Light-headedness, dizziness, and headache;
- Body weakness;
- Visual changes, such as blurred, dim, dark, tunnel-like, or seeing black spots.

Sometimes there are no symptoms before the fainting (no prodrome).

During syncope, children and youth lose consciousness, for a few seconds to a few minutes and may:

- Look pale or ashen;
- Wet themselves with urine;
- Become very sweaty;
- Have 'twitching' of the arms, legs or body.



## How can we find out what is causing the syncope?

Most of the time, doctors can pinpoint the cause by:

- Taking a careful medical history;
- Going over all the details of the fainting spell.

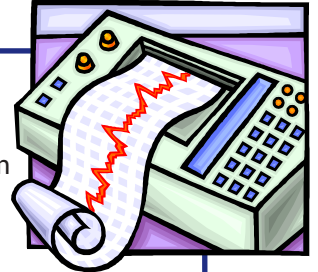
Your child or teen will also have an ECG (electrocardiogram). Your doctor will decide if other tests (like blood or other heart tests) are needed. Most of the time, an ECG is the only test needed.

### ECG: Electrocardiogram

This test helps the doctor see the heart's electrical activity and rhythm. An ECG can show if there are problems in different areas of the heart.

For this test we will:

Place sticky pads on your child or teen's chest, arms and legs. Each pad has a wire attached to an ECG machine or TV-like screen. The ECG records a tracing of your child's heart rhythm. AN ECG takes just 5-10 minutes. It is important for children and youth to lie very still during the ECG.



## Taking care of a child or teen with syncope

Treatments for syncope will depend on the cause, so follow your doctor's instructions. Most cases of syncope do not require specific treatment (benign or usual fainting). If your child or teen has 'benign' fainting, and it happens often, your doctor may suggest:

- Increasing fluid and salt intake;
- Certain medicines.

It may also be helpful to make sure your child or teen:

- Doesn't stand up too quickly;
- Avoids standing in the same position for long periods;
- Avoid saunas or very hot baths and showers.

If your child or teen gets dizzy:

- Have her sit or lie down right away;
- Raise her feet higher than her head (this gets the blood flowing back to the heart and brain).

## What are the risks of having syncope?

Even with benign syncope, children and youth may hurt themselves when they fall. It's important for them to sit or lie down as soon as they feel dizzy.

People who faint a lot may not be able to drive. Otherwise the risks of syncope depend on the medical condition causing the fainting.

### Want more info?

Syncope Trust and Reflex Anoxic Seizures  
<http://www.stars-us.org/>

The Fainting Phenomenon: Understanding Why People Faint and What to do about It.  
Author; Blair P. Grubb ISBN-10:1405148411

