Fainting

What it is and what you can do about it

What is fainting?

Fainting is a sudden, brief loss of consciousness caused by a temporary reduction in blood flow to the brain. Being prone to fainting is not a serious illness, but it can be very inconvenient and cause limitations to you and those around you.

Fainting occurs when blood pressure drops too low, often from too much blood pooling in the abdomen and legs. Normally, the body automatically restores blood pressure by contracting the blood vessels in the legs and abdomen and by making the heart beat faster. If this mechanism does not work properly, too little blood is pumped to the brain, which can cause symptoms including light-headedness or brief loss of consciousness.

What can you do about it?

Sitting or lying down helps restores blood flow to the brain, and you will usually recover quickly. You may still feel tired or shaky for some time afterwards. Treatment for fainting consists mainly of lifestyle advice to help prevent fainting from happening or reduce how often it occurs.

Common triggers for fainting

Many people know the situations in which they are more likely to faint, for example:

- Strong emotions (such as fear, pain, or the sight of blood)
- Standing still for a long time (e.g. in a queue)
- Warm environments (such as a sauna, hot weather, or hot shower)
- After eating or when not eating for a long time
- Immediately after exertion.

What does fainting feel like?

Before fainting, you may notice:

- Light-headedness
- Black spots in your vision
- Nausea
- Sweating
- Looking pale
- Sometimes, there may be no warning signs.

How can you prevent fainting?

- Try to identify common triggers and avoid them if possible
- Before blood tests, tell staff that you are prone to fainting and lie down during the test
- If you feel you are about to faint, perform the exercises you have been taught (see next page). If these do not help, sit down or, preferably, lie down
- Drink plenty of water: at least 2 litres per day
- Add a bit of extra salt to your food (if your diet allows)
- Avoid alcohol
- Stay in good physical shape by getting plenty of exercise.

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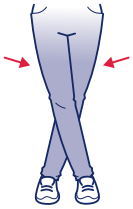
Exercises

Some people can sense fainting spells. The following exercises can help you prevent fainting.
What works best varies from person to person. Try to stay calm and keep breathing evenly during the exercise.
Important: if the exercises don't help, lie down. These exercises are only helpful if you are experiencing symptoms.

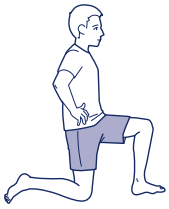


1. Cross your legs and press them firmly together.

2. Stand on your toes and tense your leg and abdominal muscles.

3. Squat down. Important: Tense your leg muscles when you stand up again to prevent fainting symptoms from returning.

4. While standing, place one foot on a chair (or other elevated support).



5. Kneel on one knee on the floor and bend the other knee out in front of you. This exercise is similar to exercise 4 but can also be performed if you do not have a chair or other form of support.

Want to know more?

Do you have any questions? Please contact the secretariat of your outpatient clinic.
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