

Safety Tips: Low Blood Pressure

Are you at Risk for Falls?

Do you feel dizzy or lightheaded if you stand up quickly? Many older adults have this problem when getting up in the morning or after sitting still for some time. Some people have a drop in blood pressure when they stand up that can cause lightheadedness. When severe, this problem is called **orthostatic hypotension**. Lightheadedness increases the risk of falling, but there are things you can do to decrease your risk.

Always Follow the “Slow and Go” Rule

When getting out of bed in the morning:

1. First sit on the side of the bed with your feet hanging over the side.
2. Dorsiflex (alternate pointing your toes and pulling them towards you) your feet 10 times.
3. Stand up.
4. Count to 10 before you start walking.

You should also follow this rule if you get up at night to use the bathroom or any time you have been lying down or sitting still for more than 20 minutes.

Treatments

Side Effects. Talk to your health care provider about any side effects you may have with your medicines. Common medications to watch for include: diuretics, blood pressure medicines, and nitrates.

Walking Aids. Your health care provider may recommend that you use a cane or a walker for support. Ideally the cane or walker should give you extra stability when walking and can help you avoid a fall if you become unsteady. Be sure to be properly fit for your cane or walker and follow the instructions for use.

Non-pharmacologic Therapy. Some combination of the following measures may help the symptoms of low blood pressure:

- Drinking sufficient fluids (consult your health care provider for the right amount)
- Rising slowly after lying in bed or sitting in a chair for a long time.
- Pulling your toes towards your head before standing.
- Crossing your legs while sitting upright.
- Following a high-salt diet aimed at producing a modest weight gain.
- Wearing elastic compression stockings that cover the calf and thigh.
- Elevating the head of the bed 5° to 20°, which causes your body to retain fluid and salt
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If you still have symptoms of dizziness or lightheadedness after taking these measures, you may need to use medications.

Disclaimer: This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Your health care provider should be consulted for personalized information

(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)