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Syncope

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). [Syncope Information Page](#).

Syncope is a medical term used to describe a temporary loss of consciousness due to the sudden decline of blood flow to the brain. Syncope is commonly called fainting or “passing out.” If an individual is about to faint, he or she will feel dizzy, lightheaded, or nauseous and their field of vision may “white out” or “black out.” The skin may be cold and clammy. The person drops to the floor as he or she loses consciousness. After fainting, an individual may be unconscious for a minute or two, but will revive and slowly return to normal. Syncope can occur in otherwise healthy people and affects all age groups, but occurs more often in the elderly.

There are several types of syncope. *Vasovagal* syncope usually has an easily identified triggering event such as emotional stress, trauma, pain, the sight of blood, or prolonged standing. *Carotid sinus* syncope happens because of constriction of the carotid artery in the neck and can occur after turning the head, while shaving, or when wearing a tight collar. *Situational* syncope happens during urination, defecation, coughing, or as a result of gastrointestinal stimulation. Syncope can also be a symptom of heart disease or abnormalities that create an uneven heart rate or rhythm that temporarily affect blood volume and its distribution in the body. Syncope isn't normally a primary sign of a neurological disorder, but it may indicate an increased risk for neurologic disorders such as Parkinson's disease, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), diabetic neuropathy, and other types of neuropathy. Certain classes of drugs are associated with an increased risk of syncope, including diuretics, calcium antagonists, ACE inhibitors, nitrates, antipsychotics, antihistamines, levodopa, narcotics, and alcohol.