

What is Syncope?

Syncope is a relatively common problem in young people. Syncope means to faint or feel very dizzy to the point of not being able to function or actually passing out. Most of the time it is not dangerous.

It can be categorized into two major groups....Dangerous and Benign. Dangerous or life threatening syncope can be caused by electrical problems or severe structural problems of the heart. These can usually be detected by history, physical exam, EKG and echocardiograms. Conditions that fall into this category include IHSS, Long QT, Brugada Syndrome and other electrical abnormalities of the heart. Severe stenotic lesions of the heart and some post operated heart conditions can sometimes cause a lose of blood pressure enough to cause syncope. In these cases we usually see fainting commonly associated with exercise, loud noises, or pain prior to fainting. Treatment is tailored to the specific condition.

Much more commonly, young people faint from more benign conditions. These can be categorized as neurocardiogenic syncope, vaso-vagal syncope, or orthostatic syncope.

Neurocardiogenic syncope usually occurs after standing for a period of time and is not related to exercise. Typically with exercise the heart is pumping enough blood to the body to maintain perfusion to the brain. It is caused by abnormal "sensors" readings in the heart and aorta that allow the heart to slow down inappropriately, or for the blood pressure to drop inappropriately, thereby causing a person to faint. Usually these folks can not stand up still for more than 7 or 8 minutes without feeling faint. Sometimes we need to do a "tilt table test" to document this. The most common treatment for this condition is either with Sudafed or a beta Blocker in conjunction with increased fluids and salt. Other medications that help retain salt can be helpful.

Vaso vagal syncope is more common and usually associated with some type of painful or anxiety provoked stimulus. For example.....getting blood drawn, argument with boy/girl friend, bad grade on test. Also when we are sick with flu or nausea, vomiting is much more likely to occur. The treatment is usually simple; laying down and waiting for the dizziness to pass. Again, fluids can sometimes be helpful.

Orthostatic syncope is very common also. We all get the feeling of feeling a little dizzy when we first stand up from sitting. In some people this is more exaggerated and can actually cause a person to faint. This is made worse when we are hot, dehydrated, or are sick. Sometimes when students participate in sports and practice they may not maintain good hydration and they are more susceptible to fainting. We sometimes see this in people who are standing in a line for a long time.

If you have any questions please ask one of our doctors.