Orthostatic Hypotension

Orthostatic hypotension is a sudden fall in blood pressure. It occurs when a person goes from a sitting or lying position to a standing position.

SYMPTOMS

- Lightheadedness or dizziness.
- Fainting or near-fainting.
- A fast heart rate (*tachycardia*).
- Weakness.
- Feeling tired (*fatigue)*.

CAUSES

- Loss of body fluids (*dehydration*).
- Medicines that lower blood pressure.
- Sudden changes in posture, such as sudden standing when you have been sitting or lying down.
- Taking too much of your medicine.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver may find the cause of orthostatic hypotension through:

- A history and/or physical exam.
- Checking your blood pressure. Your caregiver will check your blood pressure when you are:
  - Lying down.
  - Sitting.
  - Standing.
- Tilt table testing. In this test, you are placed on a table that goes from a lying position to a standing position. You will be strapped to the table. This test helps to monitor your blood pressure and heart rate when you are in different positions.

TREATMENT

- If orthostatic hypotension is caused by your medicines, your caregiver will need to adjust your dosage. **Do not** stop or adjust your medicine on your own.
- When changing positions, make these changes slowly. This allows your body to adjust to the different position.
- Pressure stockings that are worn on your lower legs may be helpful.
- Your caregiver may have you consume extra salt. **Do not** add extra salt to your diet unless directed by your caregiver.
- Eat frequent, small meals. Avoid sudden standing after eating.
- Avoid hot showers or excessive heat.
- Your caregiver may give you fluids through the vein (*intravenous*).
- Your caregiver may put you on medicine to help enhance fluid retention.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You faint or have a near-fainting episode. **Call your local emergency services (911 in U.S.).**
- You have or develop chest pain.
- You feel sick to your stomach (*nauseous*) or vomit.
- You have a loss of feeling or movement in your arms or legs.
- You have difficulty talking, slurred speech, or you are unable to talk.
- You have difficulty thinking or have confused thinking.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 03/14/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.