Hypotension

As your heart beats, it forces blood through your arteries. This force is your blood pressure. If your blood pressure is too low for you to go about your normal activities or support the organs of your body, you have Hypotension, or Low Blood Pressure. When your blood pressure becomes too low, you may not get enough blood to your brain, and you may feel weak, lightheaded, or develop a more rapid heart rate. In a more severe case, you may faint: this is a sudden, brief loss of consciousness where you pass out and recover completely.

SOME COMMON CAUSES OF LOW BLOOD PRESSURE ARE:

- Loss of blood or fluids from the body. This occurs during rapid blood loss. It can also come from dehydration when the body is not taking in enough fluids or is losing fluids faster than they can be replaced. Examples of this would be severe vomiting and diarrhea.
- Not taking in enough fluids and salts. This is common in the elderly where thirst mechanisms are not working as well. This means you do not feel thirsty and you do not take in enough water.
- Use of blood pressure pills and other medications that may lower the blood pressure below normal.
- Over medication (always take your medications as directed).
- Irregular heart beat or heart failure when the heart is no longer working well enough to support blood pressure.

Hospitalization is sometimes required for low blood pressure if fluid or blood replacement is needed, if time is needed for medications to wear off, or if further evaluation is needed. Less common causes of low blood pressure might include *peripheral or autonomic neuropathy* (nerve problems), Parkinson's disease, or other illnesses. Treatment might include a change in diet, change in medications (including medicines aimed at raising your blood pressure), and use of support stockings.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Maintain good fluid intake and use a little more salt on your food (if you are not on a restricted diet or having problems with your heart such as congestive heart failure). This is especially important for the elderly when you may not feel thirsty in the winter.
- Take your medications as directed.
- Get up slowly from reclining or sitting positions. This gives your blood pressure a chance to adjust. As we grow older our ability to regulate our blood pressure may not be as good as when we were younger.
- Wear support stockings if prescribed.
- Use walkers, canes, etc., if advised.
- Talk with your physician or nurse about a Home Safety Evaluation (usually done by visiting nurses).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have a fainting episode. DO NOT DRIVE YOURSELF. Call 911 if no other help is available.
- You have chest pain, *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach) or vomiting.
- You have a loss of feeling in some part of your body, or lose movement in your arms or legs.
- You have difficulty with speech.
- You become sweaty and/or feel light headed.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE RE-CHECKED AS INSTRUCTED.

MAKE SURE YOU:

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

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