



Working together with individuals, families and medical professionals to offer support and information on Syncope

What is Syncope?

Syncope (sin-co-pee) is often dismissed as simple fainting, but for a significant number of individuals, the blackout is anything but simple. It is caused by a sudden lack of blood supply to the brain, resulting in loss of consciousness. This can be due to a drop in blood pressure or sudden changes in the heart rhythm decreasing the amount of blood the heart pumps to the body. Several warning symptoms can appear such as light headedness, fading of vision and buzzing in the ears, before the loss of consciousness and fall. Some times as the brain is deprived of oxygen due to the decrease in blood flow, features more typical of epilepsy can occur like stiffening, spasms and jerks. Complex Syncope (Reflex Anoxic Syncope or Vasovagal Syncope) often appear just like a "seizure" or "fit", this sometimes leaves many patients with an incorrect diagnosis of epilepsy. It is very important to make sure that syncope and epilepsy are distinguished from each other.

Cause of Syncope:

There are many causes, some common and some rare. The most common involve the action of the nervous system (brain, spinal cord and nerves). With the cardiovascular system this involves the heart and blood vessels. The part of the nervous system most involved is the autonomic nervous system, so called because it works on its own, without voluntary control. The autonomic nervous system is important in the normal regulation of breathing, heart rate and blood pressure, so it is not surprising that it is involved in disturbances of these functions. Some typical causes can be due to the drop in blood sugar, inability to tolerate prolonged standing, headaches, heat intolerance, fatigue, chest pain and unexpected stimuli such as pain (however slight) fright or shock.

Other Names for Syncope:

Reflex Asystolic Syncope, Vasovagal Syncope, Reflex Syncope, Neurally Mediated Syncope, Neurocardiogenic Syncope, Pallid Syncope, Stephenson's Syndrome, Vago Cardio-Inhibitory Fainting Fit

It should be understood that these terms are all names for temporary upsets to the control of the blood circulation by the brain and nervous system, and are not necessarily very different from each other. A common feature is that all these syncope's tend to occur in certain situations and with certain triggers, reflecting the nervous system involvement.

Is Syncope Dangerous?

Syncope occurs in most people at some stage in their life. It is almost never a sign of underlying life-threatening disease. However, people with frequent or severe attacks should seek a medical diagnosis for rare conditions which might need special treatment e.g. Syncope due to irregular heart rhythms or raised pressure in the head.

Is there Help for those Living with Syncope?

In some Syncope's medical intervention is appropriate. STARS is here to offer help, provide information and support. Meetings and conferences provide the opportunity for shared experiences and mutual support.

Did you Know ?

- ◆ Syncope affects a million-and-a half Americans each year
- ◆ More than 40% are misdiagnosed or go undiagnosed.
- ◆ It is estimated that loss of consciousness will affect up to 50% of the population at some stage in their life.
- ◆ Syncope is the most common cause of loss of consciousness.
- ◆ Syncopal episodes account for 6% of ER visits and up to 3% of hospital admissions in the U.S.
- ◆ Due to a similarity in symptoms, syncope can often be misdiagnosed as epilepsy. 30% of adults and 39% of children are misdiagnosed with epilepsy, many of whom are actually suffering with syncope.