

Syncope and your diet - online for teens

This factsheet has been designed to provide advice about food and fluids for young people affected by syncope or PoTS.

Blood pressure and heart rate can be influenced by what we eat and drink. These changes can be quite dramatic if you have been diagnosed with vasovagal syncope or postural tachycardia syndrome (PoTS) so we have put together some advice to help you manage your symptoms.

What should I drink?

It has been known for a long time that if you are dehydrated you are prone to fainting. An average healthy adult requires at least 1.5 litres of fluid per day. When exercising or in a hot environment, much more may be needed.

Young adults who are affected by PoTS or vasovagal syncope are often advised to increase their fluid intake to over 2 litres a day and more on a hot day. Children are advised to increase their fluids until their urine is a very pale yellow colour.

Alcohol: It is important to avoid alcohol consumption because alcohol dilates (opens up) blood vessels and can lower blood pressure and provoke syncope (fainting). People affected by PoTS are often alcohol intolerant. One glass can feel like two! People who drink alcohol should always try to balance a glass of alcohol with a glass of water or juice which will help to counter the dehydrating effects of alcohol.

Drinks that are favoured to help increase fluid intake: Sports hydration drinks, Lucozade, cola, orange squash. Tea and coffee (caffeine).

Monitoring: You may find it helpful to drink from a refillable sports bottle. This allows you to keep track of how much you have consumed as it is very easy to underestimate this when you are busy.

What should I eat?

You may experience deterioration in your symptoms after meals. This is because blood is diverted to the blood vessels which supply the organs in the abdomen in an effort to digest food.

Carbohydrates: Meals rich in refined carbohydrate (e.g. sugars and white flour) can make symptoms worse. If you like to eat carbohydrate foods, try brown rice and pasta and wholegrain bread.

Salt: If you have a tendency to low blood pressure and syncope, you may be advised to increase your salt intake. Although a high salt diet can be helpful to some people, in others, too much salt can be harmful. If your doctor recommends increased salt, it is important to check with your doctor exactly how much extra salt they would like you to have.

Some young people eat salty foods such as crisps, salted nuts, bread, and instant noodles as a few examples. Fast foods like burgers, chips and pizza are often salty, but they also contain unhealthy fats and should be limited.

However, before making any changes to your salt intake, always ask your doctor if this is advisable.

Fibre: It is important to avoid constipation. Straining on the toilet can cause fainting. Eat high fibre foods such as bran cereal, fresh and dried fruits, vegetables, beans and lentils.

Potassium: If you are taking a medication called fludrocortisone you are prone to losing potassium. This can be dangerous so should be monitored by blood tests. If your levels are low try to eat food containing lots of potassium such as bananas, avocados, dates, beans and lentils, spinach, mushrooms, melon and dried fruits.



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Different foods favoured by young people affected by syncope or PoTS: crisps, salted nuts, bacon, sausages, feta, marinated olives, Marmite, dark chocolate, instant noodles and packaged soups.

When should I eat?

You may find that your symptoms get worse if you are hungry or have eaten a large heavy meal. It is best to eat little and often i.e. graze all day long! Eat more stodgy foods in the evenings when you can lie down and rest afterwards. Try to keep your weight within normal limits. Low body weight can lower blood pressure and make you prone to fainting. Being overweight will increase blood pressure, but causes other health problems and is not recommended.

Why me?

So, why should you have to watch what you eat and drink when you feel tired and unwell? Actually, this is all about a balanced diet. With the exception of high salt intake, it is what everyone should want to keep them healthy, whether you have syncope problems or not. It also helps to give you some control over your symptoms. It is healthy, it makes you feel better and it can be rewarding.



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