

Where can you go to treat your OH?

- ▶ When you have been discharged from the hospital following your SCI, you will be given the necessary methods and information to manage your OH.
- ▶ If your symptoms and/or discomfort with OH worsen, contact your physician and book an appointment to discuss further options or adjustment of your current treatment.

What other information is available on OH?

- ▶ SCIRE (The Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Evidence)

Online source: www.scireproject.com

- ▶ Krassioukov *et al.*, (2009) *A.P.M.R.* "A systematic review of the management of orthostatic hypotension after spinal cord injury".

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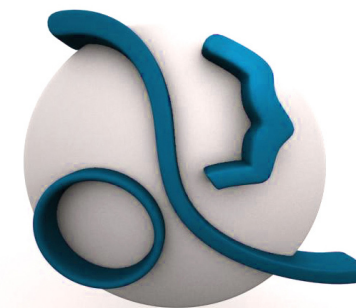
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Orthostatic Hypotension and You: Recognize and Act



**If you feel dizzy or lightheaded
this may indicate that you
are experiencing orthostatic
hypotension**

*You, your family, friends, and/or
personal caregivers should read
this pamphlet*

This initiative is supported by the IPC



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What is Orthostatic Hypotension (OH)?

- ▶ It is a decrease in your blood pressure that is caused when you sit up after lying down.
- ▶ When you sit up, the force of gravity causes blood to move away from your upper body and pool in your lower body.
- ▶ Following your spinal cord injury (SCI), the blood vessels in your body may lose the ability to push blood back to the heart, causing your blood pressure to drop.

What are the symptoms and signs of OH?

If you have OH, you may feel:

- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Feeling of faintness
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Ringing in the ears
- Cognitive impairment (trouble focusing, thinking, reacting)
- Heart palpitations (irregular heart beat)
- Headache
- Neck ache

If you have OH, you may experience:

- Syncope (blacking out, fainting, loss of consciousness)
- A decrease in blood pressure (20 mmHg or more below your normal blood pressure) upon assuming the seated position
- An increase in heart rate

Can I experience OH?

- ▶ The level and severity of your injury may determine whether or not you experience OH.
- ▶ In many individuals with high cervical and thoracic level lesions, it is possible to experience OH for many years.

What causes OH?

- Dehydration (low fluid intake).
- Injury to your peripheral nerves, not related to your SCI (peripheral neuropathy).
- Low resting blood pressure (may be particularly problematic first thing in the morning).

What do you do if you think you are experiencing OH?

OH may be asymptomatic, so if suspect that you could have OH, it is a good idea to check your blood pressure regularly.

If you experience any symptoms of OH, you should perform the following or ask someone for help if you cannot do them yourself:

- Tilt your chair if possible
- Lie down and/or raise your legs if possible
- If possible, check your blood pressure and record it, and wait until your symptoms disappear before sitting upright again
- Inform your physician about your OH

For immediate treatment of OH:

- Lie down on your back if possible
- Drink fluids
- Protect yourself from heat exposure
- Elevate your legs

How can I manage my OH in the long term?

- Abdominal binder
- Pressure stockings
- Increase salt intake in diet
- Ensure adequate fluid intake (1-1.5L or 4-6 glasses/day)
- Avoid hot showers and excessive heat.
- Sleep with the head of the bed slightly elevated (15 to 20 degrees)
- Tilt training (under the guidance and supervision of a physical therapist, you can gradually increase upright stance)
- Check blood pressure regularly (check it daily when standing, and record it, and also check when you are experiencing symptoms)

You must discuss medical treatments available with your physician.