

## **FAINTING**

Fainting (also known as *syncope*), is defined as a sudden loss of consciousness followed by a quick and total recovery. Fainting may happen for a variety of reasons, but is most commonly from a sudden drop in blood pressure, which is also known as vasovagal syncope. This drop in blood pressure causes the brain to temporarily not receive enough blood flow, and loss of consciousness is the brain's way of protecting itself.

### **Causes**

Fainting may be triggered by a number of different things, including:

- Standing too long
- Heat
- Dehydration
- Going too long without eating
- Being unwell
- Breath-holding during a tantrum
- Being frightened
- Standing up too quickly
- Being in severe pain

Sometimes rare medical conditions can mimic fainting, for example:

- An underlying heart condition or heart rhythm disturbance
- Exposure to a toxic substance, including some medications and drugs
- Low blood sugar
- Severe allergic reaction (*anaphylaxis*)
- Seizures
- Migraine headaches
- Hyperventilation
- Panic attacks

### **Signs & Symptoms**

Before fainting, a child often experiences warning signs such as:

- feeling dizzy or light-headed
- feeling warm or clammy
- hearing or vision changes
- feeling nauseous
- feeling weak
- turning pale

When a child faints, they usually go limp and their limbs may twitch briefly. They usually reawaken in seconds, and are back to themselves quickly.

### **How can you help if your child?**

- If they are experiencing the warning signs, teach them to lie down or sit with their head between their legs until the symptoms pass
- If they faint, try to ease their fall if possible to prevent injury
- Check to ensure they are still breathing. If they are not, call 911 immediately
- Prop their legs above the level of their chest to increase blood flow to their brain
- When they awaken, have them stay down for 10-15 minutes and then get up very slowly
- Giving them a glass of juice and putting a cold facecloth on their forehead may help them feel better
- If they do not recover quickly or are acting abnormally afterwards, call 911

### **When should we see a doctor?**

Fainting is usually not dangerous, unless there is a possibility of getting hurt from a fall or fainting while driving. Fainting is very common and happens to 1 out of 3 people during their lifetime.

If your child faints, it is a good idea to discuss this with their doctor as they may want to examine them or do tests to rule out other causes.

Note: if fainting happens during exercise, this may be a sign of an underlying medical condition, and your child should be assessed urgently by a doctor.

### **How can I prevent my child from fainting?**

- Ensure your child is drinking adequate amounts of fluid (preferably water) during the day – aim for 2-3 L
- Ensure your child does not skip meals
- If your child is prone to fainting, encourage them to stand up slowly if they have been lying or sitting for a long time
- If standing or sitting for a long time, try to get your child to move around and tense their muscles to keep blood circulating well
- Avoid environments that are overheated, cramped, and have poor air flow