

Low Blood Pressure and Parkinson's

Some of you experience issues with drops in blood pressure, which can cause dizziness and light-headedness. This may occur frequently or every now and then. This can affect your confidence when exercising or going about your daily life.

As with all Parkinson's symptoms, not everyone will experience this. But it's good to have the knowledge just in case it's something that you experience in the future.

The drop in blood pressure when moving from lying or sitting into standing is called orthostatic hypotension. Drops in blood pressure can also happen when you are working the legs hard (like when going up a flight of stairs or doing lots of squats) or after eating a large meal.

Normally, to keep blood pressure in check, the nervous system releases a chemical called norepinephrine, which causes our blood vessels to tighten, sending blood from the legs and trunk up to the brain. People with Parkinson's often have lower amounts of norepinephrine. Because of this deficiency, blood pressure may not return to normal immediately after standing, after exertion or after a large meal, resulting in fatigue, dizziness or even fainting.

Parkinson's medications can also contribute to low blood pressure, along with some antidepressants, diuretics (water pills), drugs for urinary problems and erectile dysfunction, and medications used to treat high blood pressure.

Heart disease, fever, anaemia (low red blood cell count), low sodium (salt) and dehydration can also lower blood pressure.

Dehydration is very common - when people are dehydrated, their body water decreases. Low body water means lower blood volume, which generally leads to low blood pressure.

What you can do if you have issues with low blood pressure

- **Keep your fluids up**, especially when exercising and in hot weather. We should all be drinking at least 6-8 glasses of water a day. Some recommend drinking a very cold glass of water in the morning, and before any planned exertion, such as exercise – I've known this work well for some. Get into good habits – when you take your medications don't just take a sip of water, have a glass.
- **Increase your salt intake** slightly (do this under medical guidance only).
- **Always take alternatives to exercises that involve repeated up/down movements**, like burpees, mountain climbers or walk outs. These should always be offered to you but if not, ask. If you are doing lots of squats or step ups, rest after every 5 reps or so. Don't let pride get the better of you – everyone will find they need to take it a bit easier at times. No one is judging. We want you to exercise well, not just hard!
- **Don't get stand up too quickly**. Stand for 20 seconds or so before moving off – sometimes the dizziness can be slightly delayed and you don't want to all of sudden feel dizzy or faint when you are halfway across the room. If you find that your symptoms are delayed by a few minutes (which can happen for some), make sure you plan ahead so you know where you can sit down quickly if needed.
- You don't necessarily need to avoid floor work during exercise, but **make sure that you come back up slowly** i.e. sitting up for a few seconds first, then kneeling for a few seconds, then standing. Stay close to the wall or have a chair close by in case you need support. If floor work really doesn't agree with you, you should always be provided with an option to exercise or stretch in sitting.
- **Get the blood pumping** - try doing a few buttock clenches, ankle rotations and leg kicks before standing, especially if you've been sitting for a long time.
- **Eat regularly and avoid large meals**, if you notice this is an issue.
- **Always speak to your doctor or Parkinson's nurse** if you experience any new issues, including dizziness. It could be that a slight adjustment in medications will help, or there might be another underlying cause that needs to be addressed. **Compression stockings or an abdominal binder** can work well for some, if drops in blood pressure are becoming a significant issue.