Blood pressure (low) - hypotension
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Blood and blood vessels

Also called

- Low blood pressure

Summary

- Hypotension, or low blood pressure, means that the pressure of blood circulating around the body is lower than normal or lower than expected.
- Some causes of hypotension include blood loss, dehydration and certain medications, such as antihypertensive drugs.

The heart pumps blood around the body through the blood vessels. Blood pressure is the amount of force exerted on the artery walls by the pumping blood. Blood pressure varies according to environmental demands. For example, it rises during physical exertion and drops in extreme heat.

Hypotension, or low blood pressure, means that the pressure of blood circulating around the body is lower than normal, or lower than expected given the environmental conditions. However, 'hypotension' is a relative term – one person may have low blood pressure compared to others of similar physical characteristics, but may be perfectly healthy.

Low blood pressure is only a problem if it has a negative impact on the body. For example, vital organs (particularly the brain) may be starved of oxygen and nutrients if the blood pressure is too low for that particular person.

Symptoms of hypotension

Substantial blood loss can cause a sudden drop in blood pressure (shock). The most dramatic symptom of sudden hypotension is unconsciousness. Usually, low blood pressure develops over time.

Symptoms include:

- Light-headedness, when standing from a sitting or lying position
- Unsteadiness
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Blurred vision
- Fatigue
- Fainting.

Causes of hypotension

Blood pressure is measured using a device known as a sphygmomanometer. If the measurement drops 30mmHg below the person’s usual blood pressure, this is considered to be hypotension.

Low blood pressure has many different causes including:

- Emotional stress, fear, insecurity or pain (the most common causes of fainting)
- Dehydration, which reduces blood volume
- The body’s reaction to heat, which is to shunt blood into the vessels of the skin, leading to dehydration
- Blood donation
- Internal bleeding, such as a perforated stomach ulcer
- Blood loss from trauma, such as a road accident or deep cut
- Pregnancy
- Medications for high blood pressure
- Diuretics, which produce fluid loss
- Medications for depression
- Medications for certain heart conditions
- Allergic reaction to certain drugs or chemicals
- Some forms of infection, such as toxic shock syndrome
- Heart disease, which can hamper the pumping action of the heart muscle
- Some nervous system disorders, such as Parkinson’s disease
- Addison’s disease (where the adrenal glands fail to produce sufficient blood-pressure-maintaining hormones).

Orthostatic hypotension

Generally, when you stand upright from a sitting or lying position, the blood vessels in your body respond to gravity by constricting. This increases blood pressure.
Orthostatic hypotension means that the blood vessels don’t adjust to a standing position and, instead, allow the blood pressure to drop, resulting in a feeling of light-headedness.

Causes include:
- Nervous system diseases, such as neuropathy
- Prolonged bed rest
- Dehydration
- Irregular heart beat (heart arrhythmia).

Treatment for hypotension

Treatment depends on the cause. For example, the dosages of existing medications may need to be altered or a bleeding stomach ulcer surgically repaired. If no particular cause can be found, drugs may be used to raise blood pressure. In extreme cases, a lower body pressure suit may be required.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Hypotension, or low blood pressure, means that the pressure of blood circulating around the body is lower than normal or lower than expected.
- Low blood pressure is only a problem if it has a negative impact on the body and produces symptoms.
- Some causes of hypotension include blood loss, dehydration and certain medications, such as antihypertensive drugs.

References

- Low blood pressure (hypotension), Mayo Clinic US. More information here.
Blood and blood vessels explained

Blood count

The full blood count (FBC) test looks for abnormalities in the blood, such as unusually high or low numbers of blood cells.

Blood groups

A person's blood group is determined by a pair of genes, one each inherited from their mother and father.

Bone marrow

Bone marrow is the spongy tissue in the hollow centres of a person's long bones and is the blood cell 'factory'.

Circulatory system

The heart, blood and blood vessels work together to service the cells of the body.

Heart explained

The heart is about the size of a clenched fist and lies in the middle of your chest, behind and slightly to the left of your breastbone.

Lipoedema

Lipoedema is a painful, chronic, symmetrical swelling in the legs, thighs, buttocks and sometimes arms due to the accumulation of fat in the subcutaneous tissues. The onset often occurs during puberty.
Lymphatic system
The lymphatic system manages fluid levels in the body, filters out bacteria and houses types of white blood cells.

Cholesterol

- **Cholesterol**
  Your body needs cholesterol, but it can make its own. You don't need cholesterol in your diet.

- **Cholesterol - healthy eating tips**
  Replacing foods that contain saturated fats with foods that contain polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats will help to lower your cholesterol.

- **Genetic factors and cholesterol**
  Familial hypercholesterolaemia is an inherited condition characterised by higher than normal levels of blood cholesterol.

- **Triglycerides**
  If a person habitually eats more kilojoules than they burn, they will have raised triglyceride levels in the blood.

Iron anaemia and blood disorders

- **Anaemia**
  When a person is anaemic, the red blood cells have to work harder to get oxygen around the body.

- **Haemochromatosis**
  Haemochromatosis (iron overload disorder) tends to be under-diagnosed, partly because its symptoms are similar to those caused by a range of other illnesses.

- **Hughes syndrome**
  Hughes syndrome is thickening of the blood caused by abnormal immune system cells.

- **Iron**
  Iron is important for transporting oxygen in the blood.

- **Iron deficiency - adults**
  Don't take iron supplements unless advised by your doctor.

- **Iron deficiency - children**
  Keep iron supplements away from children - as little as one to three grams can kill a child under six years.

- **Porphyria**
  Porphyria can affect the skin, nervous system, gastrointestinal system or all of these, depending on the specific type.

- **Thalassaemia**
  Thalassaemia is an inherited blood disorder that can cause anaemia or death if not treated.

Bleeding clotting and infections

- **Bleeding**
  Bleeding may be minor or it may be a life-threatening medical emergency.

- **Haemophilia**
  All children with severe haemophilia are given preventative treatment with infusions of blood products before they have a bleed.

- **Needlestick injury**
  A needlestick injury means the skin is accidentally punctured by a used needle. Diseases that could be transmitted by a needle or needlestick injury include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

- **Nosebleeds**
  Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not severe or serious.

- **Septicaemia**
  Bacteria in the bowels, urinary tract, mouth and skin can cause disease if they get into the bloodstream.

- **Subarachnoid haemorrhage**
A subarachnoid haemorrhage is any bleed located underneath one of the protective layers of the brain known as the arachnoid layer...

- **Subdural haematomas**
  Subdural haematomas are blood clots formed underneath one of the protective layers of the brain...

- **Travel tips for seniors**
  All travellers should plan carefully, but older people have a few extra concerns when travelling...

- **Von Willebrand disease**
  A person with Von Willebrand disease may have frequent nosebleeds, heavy menstruation or excessive bleeding from the mouth...

### Blood pressure

- **Blood pressure**
  Healthy eating and lifestyle changes can help to manage high blood pressure...

- **Blood pressure (high) - hypertension**
  Hypertension, or high blood pressure, can increase your risk of heart attack, kidney failure and stroke...

- **Blood pressure - keep your blood pressure down (video)**
  Heart Foundation of Australia warns of the risk of high blood pressure and tells you what you can do to keep your blood pressure down...

- **Blood pressure (low) - hypotension**
  Low blood pressure is only a problem if it has a negative impact on the body...

- **Dizziness - orthostatic hypotension**
  Postural hypotension is the lightheaded feeling you may get if you leap out of bed very quickly...

- **Fainting**
  Common causes of fainting include heat, pain, distress, the sight of blood, anxiety and hyperventilating...

- **Pulmonary hypertension**
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs...

- **Shock**
  Shock is when there is not enough blood circulating in the body. It is a life-threatening medical emergency...

- **Stroke explained**
  A stroke interrupts blood flow to an area of the brain and is a medical emergency...

### Blood vessel and bone marrow conditions

- **Amyloidosis**
  A person with amyloidosis produces aggregates of insoluble protein that cannot be eliminated from the body...

- **Aneurysm**
  An aneurysm may have no symptoms until it is either very large or it ruptures...

- **Granulomatosis with polyangiitis**
  Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA), formerly known as Wegener granulomatosis is a rare condition that targets the arteries, veins and capillaries of the kidneys and the respiratory system...

- **Henoch-Schonlein purpura**
  Henoch-Schonlein purpura causes a purple spotted skin rash which lasts around one to four weeks, and is often marked by relapses...

- **Leukaemia**
  Most children and many adults with acute leukaemia can expect to be cured, while chronic leukaemia can be successfully managed...

- **Peripheral vascular disease**
  Peripheral vascular disease is the reduced circulation of blood to a body part (other than the brain or heart)...

- **Polycythaemia vera**
  Polycythaemia vera is characterised by the production of too many red blood cells, caused by abnormal function of the bone marrow...
• Raynaud's phenomenon
  Raynaud's phenomenon can be a sign of a more serious underlying condition, so see your doctor if you experience it...

• Thalassaemia
  Thalassaemia is an inherited blood disorder that can cause anaemia or death if not treated...

• Varicose veins and spider veins
  Smaller varicose veins are usually treated by sclerotherapy ? the injection of irritant chemicals into the affected vein.

Blood-donation-and-transfusion

• Blood donation
  Donated blood is used to help people who are sick or injured, or for medical research...

• Blood transfusion
  Donated blood is screened for blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis, syphilis and HIV...

• Organ and tissue donation
  Discover the facts about organ and tissue donation, decide about becoming a donor and discuss your decision with the people close to you...

Related Information

• Blood and blood vessels
  Bleeding, blood pressure, conditions, risks and blood products...

• Dizziness - orthostatic hypotension
  Postural hypotension is the lightheaded feeling you may get if you leap out of bed very quickly...

• Fainting
  Common causes of fainting include heat, pain, distress, the sight of blood, anxiety and hyperventilating...

• Shock
  Shock is when there is not enough blood circulating in the body. It is a life-threatening medical emergency...

• Blood pressure
  Healthy eating and lifestyle changes can help to manage high blood pressure...

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Related information on other websites

• Medical Online.

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