

UNEXPLAINED SYNCOPE

More Than Fainting; Potentially Life-Threatening

What is syncope?

Syncope is a temporary loss of consciousness, often called fainting or passing out, caused by the lack of blood and oxygen in the brain.

Why is it important to address syncope?

While many conditions can lead to syncope, syncope caused by a cardiovascular condition can be especially serious. Therefore, all forms of syncope should be evaluated. Unexplained and untreated syncope often prevents people from doing ordinary things such as driving a car, exercising, traveling or maintaining a job. Patients struggling with syncope are also more vulnerable to injury caused by falls and accidents. Treating the causes of syncope can enable people to live more active lives and help them to avoid potential injuries from syncope-related falls.

What causes syncope?

Syncope can be caused by temporary conditions, such as metabolic disorders, neurological conditions, exhaustion, dehydration or emotional distress.

Other common causes of fainting are related to the cardiovascular system, known as Cardiovascular Syncope, and include conditions such as:

- Prior myocardial infarction (heart attack)
- Arrhythmia (rhythm disturbances)
 - Bradycardia (slow heart beat)
 - Tachycardia (rapid heart beat)
- Obstructed blood flow
- Congestive heart failure
- Hypotension (low blood pressure)
- Severe heart muscle disease causing congestive heart failure

What are the warning signs of syncope?

Syncope may occur with limited warning or without any warning at all, during any activity. It can be preceded by light-headedness, sweating, nausea or pale appearance. Fainting during physical activity or a history of unexplained fainting in childhood may be signs of cardiovascular syncope and an underlying heart problem that should be addressed.

How long does a syncope episode last?

The length of a syncope episode varies significantly from a brief moment to a prolonged episode in which CPR must be initiated to avoid sudden cardiac death. When syncope episodes are infrequent, it can be difficult to collect the ECG data for an accurate diagnosis.

How common is syncope?

In the United States, an estimated 97,800 patients present with unexplained syncope each year. According to the American Heart Association, syncope accounts for 3-5 percent of emergency department visits and 1-6 percent of urgent hospital admissions in the United States¹. Additionally, an estimated 20-50% of Americans will experience an episode of syncope at some point in their lives.

Who runs the greatest risk of developing syncope?

The cause of syncope is not often obvious, and the individual at highest risk can be difficult to detect. The incidence rates have been found to increase with age, increasing sharply starting at the age of 70 years and are similar among both men and women.²

What are the healthcare costs related to syncope?

A conservative estimate of total annual costs for syncope-related hospitalizations in the United States is \$2.4 billion with a mean cost of \$5,400 per hospitalization¹. Efforts to safely decrease syncope-related admissions may result in substantial costs savings.

Where can I obtain additional information?

American Heart Association – www.americanheart.org

Heart Rhythm Society – www.hrsonline.org

At Transoma Medical:

Brian Brockway, President and CEO
(651) 481-7444

www.transomamedical.com

At Padilla Speer Beardsley:

Nancy A. Johnson / Nick Banovetz
(612) 455-1745 / (612) 455-1705

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References

- 1 Shen WK, Decker WW, Smars PA, et al. Syncope Evaluation in the Emergency Department Study (SEEDS): A Multidisciplinary Approach to Syncope Management. *Circulation*. 2004;110:3636-3645.
- 2 Soteriades ES, Evans JC, Larson MG, et al. Incidence and prognosis of syncope. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. September 2002;347: 878-885