

Individuals with Parkinson's disease (PD) may experience low blood pressure (*hypotension*) at some point during their disease journey. This occurs because PD can impair the body's natural reflex mechanism, which causes automatic adjustments of your blood pressure when you change position, exercise, eat, or are out in warm or cold weather. Also, anti-Parkinson's medications (and many other drugs as well) can lower blood pressure.

Blood pressure decreases when blood vessels relax or lose their ability to constrict. If there is less fluid in the body, the circulating blood volume is decreased and blood pressure drops. Normal blood pressure range is usually 100/60 to 140/90.

When blood pressure drops below 100/60, you may recognize sensations such as dizziness, lightheadedness, or weakness. If severe, hypotension can lead to fainting and/or falling. Individuals have also used terms such as giddiness, sleepiness, tiredness, and mental or visual blurring to describe what has actually turned out to be low blood pressure. Some people may not experience any warning signals.

These sensations will often intensify upon standing or after walking. Although any time of day is possible, many report that this happens more in the early morning hours and/or 1-2 hours after receiving a dose(s) of medication.

If you notice any of the sensations described above when you move from sitting or lying down to standing, report it to your health care team, so you can work on a plan to manage the problem before an episode of fainting or falling occurs. Monitoring blood pressure should be routine. It is recommended that the nurse take your blood pressure in both seated and standing positions periodically.

Here are some simple steps you can take to help restore your blood pressure to normal.

Evaluate Medications

Your doctor should evaluate your complete medication list. Adjustments of the medications themselves or the timing sequence might be all that is needed.

Increase Fluids and Salty Foods

Increasing fluids and salt in the diet can be effective in regulating blood pressure. Drinking eight glasses of water per day and eating salty foods are commonly recommended. With more fluid in the body, circulating blood volume is enhanced and blood pressure increases.

- Caffeine**
In addition to adding fluid, drinking caffeinated coffee enhances blood vessel constriction, thus increasing blood pressure.
- Frequent, small meals**
Eat frequent, small meals, as blood pressure is often lowered after a large meal. Avoid alcohol, as it has a tendency to dilate blood vessels, contributing to lower blood pressure.
- Environment**
Warm weather, hot baths, and any activities that cause blood vessels to relax should be avoided.
- Clothing**
Waist-high compression/support hose (i.e., Jobst® stockings or Sigvars® pantyhose) can be helpful in maintaining blood pressure.
- Slow Position Change**
When rising from a lying position, sit on the edge of the bed for a few minutes; then stand up slowly, holding on to a secure support.
- Bed Position**
Lying flat for a prolonged period of time can contribute to lower blood pressure, so raise the head of the bed 30-40 degrees. This can be done if you have an adjustable mattress, or you can prop the top two legs of the bed on supports.
- Medication**
If the above measures are not effective, ask your doctor if medications to raise blood pressure are appropriate for you. Fludrocortisone (Florinef), midodrine(Proamatine), and droxidopa (Nothera) are options that work in various ways to help raise blood pressure. The risks associated with using these drugs can be controlled with close medical supervision. Some people respond better using a combination of treatments.