

GUIDELINES FOR VASOVAGAL SYNCOPE (FAINTING)

DEFINITION AND ETIOLOGY

Syncope (fainting) is a transient vascular/neurogenic reaction marked by pallor, nausea, sweating, bradycardia, and rapid fall in arterial blood pressure which, when below a critical level, results in loss of consciousness. Vasovagal syncope usually occurs in the upright position and is often preceded by warning symptoms (e.g., nausea, dizziness, weakness, yawning, apprehension, visual blurring, sweating).

Vasovagal syncope is usually due to emotional stress related to fear or pain (e.g., having blood drawn or an injection).

OBJECTIVE

The following may be observed:

1. Fall in blood pressure.
2. Slow pulse.
3. Pallor, perspiration.
4. May progress to loss of consciousness.

PROCEDURE

1. Place client in recumbent position; **lower head to the extent possible and turn head to side (prevents aspiration and tongue blocking airway). If sitting, do not lower head by bending at waist (may further compromise venous return to heart).**
2. **Loosen any tightly-fitting clothing at neck/waist.**
3. Monitor blood pressure and pulse; observe the client until completely recovered.
4. Do not **give anything by mouth** or allow the client to resume an upright position **until feeling of weakness has passed.**
5. Suggest that the client be accompanied when leaving the clinic.
6. If client does not stabilize, call EMS or refer to closest medical facility.

REFERENCES

1. Anthony S. Fauci et al., *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*, 17th ed., McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2008, Chapter 21, "Syncope," <<http://www.accessmedicine.com/content.aspx?alD=2890809>> (April 23, 2009).
2. Mark H. Beers, *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy*, 18th ed., 2006, Chapter 16, "Cardiovascular Disorders, Syncope," <<http://www.merck.com/mmpe/sec07/ch069/ch069e.html>> (April 28, 2009).
3. C. K. Stone and Margaret Strecker-McGraw, *Diagnosis & Treatment: Emergency Medicine*, 6th ed., 2007, Chapter 16, "Syncope," <<http://www.accessmedicine.com/content.aspx?alD=3100314>> (April 23, 2009).