



PRINCE WILLIAM CARDIOLOGY ASSOCIATES

HEARTBEATS

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Resolutions for a Healthy Heart

Shining the Light on Black Out Spells By Dr. Michael G. Escaño



Christopher J. Leet, M.D., FACC
Michael G. Escaño, M.D., FACC
Ara M. Maranian, M.D., FACC
Inga Lafata, ACNP

There are several reasons why people can have “black out” or fainting spells. The medical term is called “syncope” (pronounced sing-kuh-pee) which is when someone experiences a temporary loss of consciousness.

The primary causes of syncope can fall into two major categories: cardiovascular or neurological. Neurological causes may be due to a large stroke affecting particular areas of the brain or a seizure disorder. My primary discussion will be focused on some more common cardiovascular reasons that cause syncope. Causes can range from the very benign problems to problems that could lead to sudden death. But most cardiovascular causes of syncope are due to something causing the blood flow to the brain to transiently decrease, therefore, leading to the “black out”.

Most syncopal spells may have pre-syncopal symptoms. These are symptoms that can be experienced before the actual loss of consciousness occurs. Pre-syncopal symptoms can be a feeling of lightheadedness, “tunnel-vision”, palpitations or rapid heart beats, although some people may not even experience these warning signs.

Some causes can be as simple as not having enough fluid or blood volume in your circulatory system leading to low blood pressures, also known as orthostatic hypotension. If this happens, movements which are associated with gravity such as moving from a squatting position to a standing position can lead to blood rushing more to the legs (following gravity) than to the brain. This transient lack of blood flow to the brain can lead to feelings of lightheadedness, and if the heart is not able to compensate against the pull of gravity to push more blood to the brain quick enough, it can lead to syncope or fainting.

Another more benign form of syncope is known as vasovagal or neurocardiogenic syncope which is commonly portrayed on TV dramas. Of all the causes of syncope, this makes up about 20-40% of the reasons syncope occurs. This occurs when something happens to a person,

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♥ *Small changes . . . Big results* Adapt your favorite recipe for a heart healthy version
~ Recipe from Prevention Magazine

Macaroni and Cheese

Make these small changes and get big results by replacing the powdered cheese, whole milk and butter with butternut squash, fat free milk and reduced-fat cheddar cheese.

Big results – you cut out 118 calories!

1. Prepare 8 oz of whole wheat rotini according to package directions. In a medium saucepan, simmer ½ cup fat-free milk with ½ 12 oz package of frozen butternut squash until combined.
2. Remove from heat and mix with 1 cup shredded reduced-fat Cheddar cheese, ½ tsp salt, ¼ tsp dry mustard and pepper to taste.
3. Pour drained pasta into an 8” x 8” baking dish, stir in cheese mixture, and top with 1 tbsp each shredded Parmesan and bread crumbs. Bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes. Serves 4

Substituting in the creamy butternut squash adds fiber and flavor, plus antioxidants that fight disease. Using fat-free milk and reduced-fat cheese, we lowered the calories per serving from 412 to 294 and unlike the boxed variety, our version has no artificial flavors. It also provides 45% of the daily recommendation for vision-protecting vitamin A.

Prince William Cardiology Associates is committed to delivering high quality care while recognizing the importance of maintaining cost-effectiveness in an evolving healthcare environment. Our professional and qualified team strives to create a personal and respectful atmosphere while putting our hearts into treating yours.

MANASSAS
703-369-5959
8569-B Sudley Rd.
Manassas, VA 20110

WARRENTON
540-347-9898
380 Hospital Dr.
Warrenton, VA 20186

GAINESVILLE
703-369-5959
7130 Heritage Village Plaza
Suite 102
Gainesville, VA 20155



Your Heart Health...

KNOW YOUR HEART PALPITATIONS!

Palpitations are heartbeat sensations that feel like your heart is pounding or racing. You may simply have an unpleasant awareness of your own heartbeat, or may feel skipped or stopped beats. The heart's rhythm may be normal or abnormal. Palpitations can be felt in your chest, throat, or neck.

If you have never had heart palpitations before, bring them to the attention of your health care provider.

HEART PALPITATIONS CAN BE CAUSED BY:

- Exercise
- Anxiety, stress, fear
- Fever
- Caffeine, nicotine, cocaine, diet pills
- Overactive thyroid
- Anemia
- Hyperventilation
- Low levels of oxygen in your blood
- Medications such as thyroid pills, asthma drugs, beta blockers, or anti-arrhythmic. (Medications to treat an irregular heart rhythm will sometimes cause a different irregular rhythm).
- Mitral valve prolapse, a condition in which the valve that separates the left upper chamber (atrium) from the left lower chamber (ventricle) of the heart does not close properly
- Heart disease

From MedlinePlus, a service of the National Institutes of Health at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003081.htm



PREVENTION

Following are some tips if you notice your irregular heart rhythm occurs more often with certain activities

- Don't Smoke
- Limit your intake of alcohol
- Limit or stop using caffeine or caffeine products such as tea, coffee, and certain soft drinks
- Stay away from stimulants used in cough and cold medications. Some such medications contain ingredients that promote irregular heart rhythms. Read the label and ask your doctor or pharmacist what medication would be best for you.

Black outs continued from the front

usually something very emotional, get "woozy" and pass out. Vasovagal syncope occurs because of a "miss communication" between the brain and the heart.

Some more concerning causes of syncope are due to arrhythmia problems. One problem is called "heart block" where your heart beat goes too slow. The heart uses organic wires to transmit its signals to make sure the heart beats synchronously, similar to the wires of a house. Some causes of the "wires" of the heart to become disrupted or frayed are aging, heart attacks, or even too many medications. Heart block can occur transiently or can become permanent depending on the circumstances. If it becomes a problem, usually a pacemaker has to be implanted.

The most concerning and probably most dangerous causes of syncope are rapid beats called ventricular tachyarrhythmias. This is an arrhythmia that requires the most urgent attention since this potentially could lead to death. A common condition that can predispose patients to ventricular tachyarrhythmias are patient's with a history of heart attack that

has led to severely poor heart function. Other rare causes are usually from genetic causes leading to muscular or electrical derangement. Most recently, there have been recommendations where patients with poor heart function due to heart attacks may be candidates to receive an implantable defibrillator to protect them from potential ventricular arrhythmias. A defibrillator is essentially a special pacemaker that monitors the heart continuously for ventricular arrhythmias. When it determines the heart is beating dangerously wrong, it will shock the heart out of the arrhythmia, hopefully saving a life.

These are various examples of the more common causes of cardiovascular syncope. Due to the variety of possibilities, various tests can be performed to further determine the true cause. An echocardiogram, holter monitor, event monitor, implantable loop recorder, tilt table test, and electrophysiology study are some tests that are useful to further evaluate the problem.