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Orthostasis

Condition: Orthostasis or orthostatic hypotension is a decrease in blood pressure that happens soon after standing.

Background: Orthostatic hypotension occurs in approximately 20% of people 65 and older. Thirty percent of fainting episodes in the elderly are due to orthostasis.

Risk Factors: The most important risk factor for orthostatic hypotension is age. People who take blood pressure or heart disease medications are also at risk.

History and Symptoms: Orthostasis often causes lightheadedness, dizziness and fainting, which in turn leads to falls and injuries. When a person stands upright, gravity causes the blood to pool in the legs. This reduces blood pressure since less blood is circulating back to the heart to pump.

Physical Exam: A physician typically checks the patient's blood pressure and heart rate while he or she is lying down, sitting, and standing. Physicians also assess for conditions such as Parkinson's disease, cognitive impairment, depression and stroke.

Diagnostic Process: After a physical exam, if the physician is still unsure if a patient has orthostatic hypotension, he or she may order blood tests or an **electrocardiogram (ECG)**.

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