

TIPS

for Daily Life



Keep your feet up by day and your head up by night.

As often as possible throughout the day, elevate your feet to help blood return from your extremities back to your heart and brain. When sitting at home, use an ottoman or recline on the couch or in a reclining chair. When taking an extended ride in the car, use a small box or sturdy pillow to prop your feet up. Some people with CFS carry a collapsible stool (for impromptu rest periods when out), which can double as a foot rest if you're seated in a waiting room or other public space.

Overnight, however, it's better to have your head slightly elevated. This position helps the body retain fluid, rather than losing it into the urine produced through the night. Consider elevating the head of your bed slightly—just 10-15 degrees. As a side benefit, this can also help prevent overnight digestive reflux problems that can keep you awake.

Fidget. Anytime you have to stand in one place—whether it's at the kitchen sink or in line at the post office—keep moving. Flex your leg muscles and shift your weight to help keep blood from pooling in your legs. If standing in an elevator, these small movements can also help your body adjust to sudden elevation changes that can worsen your orthostatic symptoms.

If you begin to get symptoms while standing, cross your thighs in a scissors fashion and squeeze them together, or put one foot on a ledge or chair and lean as far forward as possible. These maneuvers encourage blood to flow from your legs to your heart.

On the flip side of fidgeting, take it slowly when moving from a sitting or reclining position to standing. For example, before you get out of bed in the morning, breathe deeply for a few minutes and then slowly sit up before standing.

During the summer it's important for everyone to drink plenty of fluids and avoid getting overheated. People with postural blood flow and blood pressure problems will find that drinking water all through the day will help ward off dizziness and headaches that are triggered by even mild dehydration. Some experts suggest drinking two liters of water a day to provide proper hydration.



Avoid large meals, especially at night. The digestive process requires added blood flow, drawing fluids away from other parts of the body. Instead, eat smaller meals throughout the day. Also avoid consuming alcohol because it causes dilation of the veins. (Most people with CFS and/or orthostatic intolerance find they can't tolerate alcohol anyway.)

When you do eat, shake on the salt! Salt plays an important role in helping retain fluids in the blood vessels and maintain blood pressure. For decades we've been told to restrict salt intake, but this recommendation is really intended for people who have high blood pressure or who already eat a high-salt diet.

Some people with very low blood pressure report that adding healthy high sodium foods like tomato juice or salt tablets to their diets provides a noticeable improvement in orthostatic symptoms.

Many people with CFS experience orthostatic intolerance—problems with upright posture that can include dizziness, feeling faint, muddled thinking, increased fatigue, nausea and profuse sweating. These symptoms can be worse in warm temperatures, so we offer these tips to cope during the summer months (and year round, if needed).

Stay out of warm environments as much as possible. Heat can worsen orthostatic challenges, speeding the onset of dizziness, profuse sweating, nausea and faintness. Keeping yourself even a few degrees cooler can help avoid the extra fluid lost to heat and sun exposure.

When you have to go out, make trips early in the day or after sundown. Seek shade when parking your car or attending outdoor events, or create shade for yourself by wearing a visor and/or using windshield blinds in your car while it's parked.

Some people with CFS carry small battery-powered personal fans to help stay cool. There are also more elaborate personal cooling devices that use light water mist and tiny fans to cool you. An online search of “personal cooling” will yield a variety of interesting options to explore. Sporting goods stores also often have similar products to peruse.

There are a variety of prescription medications used to treat different forms of orthostatic intolerance, including corticosteroids, betablockers and vasopressors. Determining the right medication for your specific needs is imperative. So before prescribing anything, your doctor may want you to be formally evaluated by a cardiologist or electrophysiologist using a tilt table test.

Get support. From hose, that is. Waist-high compression stockings or support hose can help push blood from the legs back into the torso.

Compression stockings are fitted to you and may require a prescription; they also have to be used correctly to provide the proper results. Lighter weight support hose are easier (and less expensive) to obtain but may not provide as much relief. You may find it takes some experimentation to make them work for you.

There are a variety of options available (even for men) at medical supply stores and online. The websites www.foryourlegs.com, www.leghealthwarehouse.com and www.compressionstore.com are just a few of the online sources offering several brands of men's and women's compression and support stockings for sale.

Showering can provoke or worsen symptoms of orthostatic intolerance because of the combined effects of standing and being in a warm environment. So if you have the option, use the tub instead of the shower for personal hygiene.

Tub bathing can have therapeutic benefits, especially if you use cooler water and can submerge yourself to shoulder level with your knees slightly bent and your arms at your sides. This posture and the pressure of the water around you can improve blood pressure and lymphatic flow. Tub bathing can also beneficially affect dilation of vessels in the skin.

Herbalists recommend a rosemary bath because of the herb's reported ability to stimulate circulation. Steep 50 grams of the herb in 1 liter of boiling water for 30 minutes and then add it to a cool bath in the morning. Since rosemary has stimulating properties, it's not recommended for baths close to bedtime.

