Types of Syncope

There can be a number of causes of syncope, but the main four groups are as followed:

- **Cardiac**: These episodes often occur without warning (no preceding symptoms prior) and can be caused by abnormal beating of the heart (arrhythmias). They can be picked up by simple tests of the electrical activity of the heart called an Electrocardiogram (ECG).

- **Orthostatic**: These episodes are often caused by a sudden drop in blood pressure upon standing. These episodes can be caused by a number of factors including dehydration, some medications or even standing up too quickly.

- **Reflex/Vasovagal**: These episodes are often caused by a disturbance in either the heart rate or blood pressure that is controlled by nerves in the brain. Often patients may have warning signs (feeling dizzy, unsteady on feet) prior to these events occurring.

- **Other**: Even after extensive investigations we are unable to determine a cause for these events in up to 20 per cent of people.

Treatment

In the emergency department, the person will be closely monitored and any injuries they may have sustained will be treated. The person may have blood tests taken to assess a number of factors and these may assist the doctors in determining why this person has experienced this episode.

Some people will need to stay in hospital for observation, particularly if they have more than one episode or if the episode occurs without any warning signs. The person may be required to have any number of the following tests:

- Blood tests.
- An Electrocardiogram (ECG) - which looks at the electrical activity of the heart.
- Further tests of the heart such as an ultrasound (echocardiogram), or a monitor of heart rhythm worn at home (holter monitor).

What to expect

After the episode the person may feel sleepy, dizzy or unwell. Pending on early investigations the person may have to have leads placed over their body that monitor their heart rate and rhythm.
If well, you may be able to go home quickly and with arrangements for early follow if needed. Occasionally you may need to stay in hospital for specific tests or monitoring of heart rhythm.

The person may also have a drip inserted into their veins and be given an infusion of fluids if the doctors feel the patient has experienced this event due to being dehydrated.

The fluid replaces electrolytes in your blood stream that aid in keeping your body hydrate and assist in maintaining blood pressure.

**Follow-up**
The person may be asked to follow-up with either their GP, or may be given a referral to see a specialist located at the hospital. Further test may be requested after review by hospital doctors.

**How can I help?**
There are some things that you can do to help a person who is having a Syncope/fainting episode:

- Remember to stay calm.
- Help the person sit or lie down (a person who has or feels faint/dizzy needs to be lying down or if unable assist them to sit forward with their head between their legs). If the person is able you can also encourage them the tense up their leg muscles, this assists in the returning of blood to the brain.
- If the person is unconscious, roll them onto their side. Check they are breathing and that they have a pulse. Make sure there is nothing in their mouth that may compromise their breathing.
- If possible, elevate the person’s feet above their head. This assists in the blood returning to the person’s brain and may help their symptoms improve.
- If the faint/dizzy episodes were caused by heat remove or loosen clothes, and try to cool the person down by wiping them with a wet cloth or fanning them. Only if the patient is awake and talking should you offer them a drink.
- Assess the person to see if they have sustained any injuries.
- Encourage the person once they start to feel better to get up slowly. If they sit/stand up too quick the symptoms often return and the person can begin to fell unwell again.

- Take note of what time the event began and time how long it goes for; if you are very worried and need help you can phone an ambulance (dial 000). If you have concerns you can always phone 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

**Seeking help**
In a medical emergency go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).

Do this if:
- You know or you think it may be the person’s first fainting episode.
- You know or think the person is diabetic or the person is pregnant.
- You know that the person has a history of heart problems.
- The person has not regained consciousness after five minutes or you are very worried and need help.
- The person fainted and has hit their head on something as they fell down.

**Disclaimer:** This health information is for general educational purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for you.

**Reference Sources:**
‘Fainting’ Better Health Channel, Victoria, 2014
‘Reflex Syncope’ STARS (Syncope Trust And Reflex anoxic Seizures), Warwickshire, 2013.