

WHAT IS SYNCOPE?

SYNCOPE is the result of the temporary cutting off of the supply of oxygenated blood to the brain. The mechanism of the syncope in susceptible individuals includes reflex cardiac standstill (always reversible) commonly following a surprising bump to the head or elsewhere. I have used the term Reflex Anoxic Seizures to describe the convulsion which accompanies a particular type of syncope. Associated marked pallor of the skin has led to these attacks being called Pallid Syncope.

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WHAT IS RAS?

REFLEX ANOXIC SEIZURES occur mainly in young children but can occur at any age. Any unexpected stimulus, such as pain, shock, fright, causes the heart and breathing to stop, the eyes to roll up into the head, the complexion to become deathly white/grey, often blue around the mouth and under the eyes, the jaw to clench and the body to stiffen, sometimes the arms and legs jerk. After 30 seconds or so, the body relaxes, the heart and breathing resume and the person is unconscious. One or two minutes later the person may regain consciousness but can remain unconscious for well over an hour. Upon recovery the person may be very emotional and then fall into a deep sleep for two to three hours and looks extremely pale. RAS attacks may occur several times per day/ week/ month. The attacks appear to come in batches.

Unfortunately, because of the symptoms, it is known that RAS is often mis-diagnosed as temper tantrums, breath holding or as epilepsy. It is, therefore, one of the aims of the Group to bring about both professional and public awareness of RAS.

LIVING WITH RAS

"I just wanted to wrap her up in cotton wool , sit and play jigsaws all day, knowing that she was unlikely to have an attack if she didn't move".

Such a response to caring for a child with RAS is natural. However parents need to balance the understandable need to protect their child from harm against the long term problems this can cause. Excluding children from everyday activities and risks can stunt their normal emotional and psychological development. Discipline and limit setting is particularly hard for families of these children but remain essential for the child's healthy development.

WHAT TO DO?

Everyone who has responsibility for a person with RAS, must know what to do, should an attack occur:

1. Make sure the individual is lying flat in a safe environment.
2. Talk reassuringly and comfort upon recovery.

Although as yet there is no cure for RAS, advances have been made with cardiac pacing as a treatment to improve the quality of life for some RAS individuals.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF STARS?

- To act as an information and support group
- To bring about public and professional awareness
- To gather more information and to aid research

WHAT DOES STARS OFFER?

- Information and reports on the various types of Syncope including Reflex Anoxic Seizures
- Videos showing natural attacks, ocular compression and media coverage
- Linking with similarly affected individuals and families
- Information leaflets and literature
- Newsletters, regional, national & international meetings
- Freephone 24 hour helpline

