

Key facts on Syncope as a cause of falls

- ♥ SYNCOPE is the medical term for a blackout that is caused by a sudden lack of blood supply to the brain.
- ♥ Syncope causes a significant amount of falls in the older adults. Each year between 35% of community living adults over 65 years and 45% of adults over 80 years have a syncopal event (blackout). At least 10% of events result in fractures.¹
- ♥ Syncope and mechanical falls are the most common reasons for older patients to present at an Accident and Emergency department.²
- ♥ Up to one third of falls in old age are associated with Cardiovascular Syncope and require admission for specific investigations.³
- ♥ Syncope misdiagnosed as mechanical falls is problematic in older adults (65 years and over). Why? 30% of older adults who have experienced a blackout will not be aware that they are losing consciousness. They will only recall having a fall. This is due to the common symptom of retrograde amnesia that often occurs prior to a blackout. Furthermore, up to half of all blackouts are not witnessed. As a result doctors often diagnose a mechanical fall and patients are not treated for the actual cause of their blackout such as an arrhythmia.
- ♥ This increases the likelihood of more falls with an allied increase in morbidity and mortality, and also contributes to the rising costs of managing falls, estimated to cost the NHS over £1 billion each year.⁴
- ♥ The consequences of syncope have a great impact on older adults. Recurrent episodes of syncope in older adults, if left untreated, can lead to serious injury, loss of confidence, reduction in independence and a greater risk of death.⁵
- ♥ It has been estimated that as many as 30% of the people over the age of 65 living outside extended-care nursing facilities have syncope caused by low blood pressure (orthostatic hypotension). In another study, researchers found that more than half of frail people, aged 60 and older, who were living in a nursing home, have syncope caused by low blood pressure, especially in the morning.⁶
- ♥ The National Audit of the Organisation of Services for Falls and Bone Health of Older People, March 2009 found serious gaps in the aftercare of services for those who have had a fall and highlighted that 50% of Primary Care Organisations do not check for heart conditions, which can cause fainting.⁷
- ♥ Syncope in older adults is potentially treatable and could reduce falls, emergency admissions and bed days as proven by the establishment of the dedicated Falls and Syncope facility in Newcastle.⁸

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