Lightheadedness and fainting

What causes lightheadedness and fainting?
Lightheadedness and fainting are common among children and teens. Lightheadedness and fainting usually happen when there is not enough blood getting to your child’s brain for a short time. This can happen when your child:
• Does not drink enough water
• Skips meals
• Stands up too fast
• Stands for too long without moving around
• Has their hair combed or brushed while standing
• Gets too hot (including staying too long in hot showers and hot tubs)
• Holds their breath forcefully or too long
• Has low red blood cell counts (anemia)
Lightheadedness and fainting are rarely caused by serious medical problems.

What should I do if my child becomes lightheaded or faints?
If your child becomes lightheaded or faints, immediately get more blood to their brain. To do this, help your child lay down and raise their legs above the head. Your child can also sit down with their head between the knees.
Teach your child to sit or lie down when they feel lightheaded. Counter-pressure techniques can also help prevent fainting:
• Crossing legs and squeezing the leg muscles until the lightheaded feeling goes away
• Gripping hands and trying to pull them apart and down

How can lightheadedness and fainting be prevented?
To prevent your child from becoming lightheaded and fainting, have your child:
• Drink more water (their urine should be clear)
• Eat more salt
• Eat healthy meals often enough to avoid getting too hungry
• Avoid caffeine
• Avoid standing in one position for a long time
• Stand up slowly after sitting or lying down
• Avoid getting too hot from hot tubs or standing too long in a hot shower
• Sit when having their hair brushed or combed by someone else

Boys who faint often should sit on the toilet to urinate, especially in the morning. If your child faints often even with proper water and salt intake, ask their healthcare provider about compression stockings.

Should my child see a healthcare provider for lightheadedness or fainting?

These risk factors suggest a more serious cause for fainting? Call your child’s healthcare provider if your child:

• Needed CPR after fainting
• Had a significant injury from fainting
• Fainted while exercising
• Fainted because of fear, sound, or noise
• Did not feel dizzy or lightheaded before fainting
• Smelled something odd or felt something rise in their abdomen before fainting
• Had chest pounding, pain, or pressure before fainting
• Jerked their body for 1 minute or more after fainting
• An abnormal heart or neurologic test
• An abnormal electrocardiogram
• Family history of unexplained sudden death, heart rhythm problems, or seizures
• History of brain or cardiac injury or disease
• Metabolic or kidney disease
• Peripheral or autonomic neuropathy
• Significant developmental delay

Notes