Dizziness

Dizziness and syncope, the clinical term for passing out, are symptoms that are linked to a broad range of diseases and disorders, which can be cardiac, pulmonary or neurologic in nature. Your doctor will want to sort out what your dizziness stems from in order to move forward. He or she will more than likely want to know:

- Exactly how do you feel when having these episodes?
- Are there any triggers that you are aware of?
- How long do the episodes last?
- Any details you feel the doctor should know in relation to these episodes.

A Plethora of Possibilities

The first doctor you see has the challenging job of trying to discern what is the root cause of your symptom. Here is a list of just some of the possible causes:

- **Arrhythmia** is an irregular or abnormal heartbeat. It is not unusual for this to lead to dizziness or lightheadedness.
- **Cerebrovascular Disorder** refers to the blood vessels that take oxygen to the brain. When you have a stroke, transient ischemic attack (TIA) or other ischemic episode, you are classified as having a cerebrovascular disorder. Dizziness, while not a regular symptom, is not unusual in any of these cases.
- **Neurologic Diseases** are classified as any disease that has to do with the brain and central nervous system. According to the University of California, San Fransisco Medical Center, there are over 600 diseases that fall under this heading. This list includes Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's, epilepsy, and brain aneurysms. These diseases often cause sufferers to be unsteady on their feet, resulting in bouts of dizziness and vertigo.
- **Valvular Disease** results in heart valves which are damaged or defective. This causes the heart to be an inefficient pump, which leads to insufficient oxygen in the blood stream.
- **Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy** occurs when the heart walls thicken and inhibit the heart's ability to beat normally. Sometimes the interior wall thickens so much, it bulges into a chamber of the heart, reducing blood flow and reducing oxygen to the brain, causing dizziness.
- **Orthostatic Hypotension** is low blood pressure. When blood pressure is abnormally low, you can expect to be dizzy, lightheaded, sleepy or even to pass out.
- **Vasovagal Syncope** is the occurrence of your blood pressure and heart rate dropping concurrently and abruptly, causing dizziness and sudden loss of consciousness.

Narrowing the Possibilities

In order to narrow the possibilities, your doctor will more than likely request one or more of the following tests:

- Electrocardiogram is a test that monitors the electrical impulses of your heart. This allows the doctor to look for patterns in those impulses, giving him or her information on how your heart is functioning. Sometimes referred to as an EKG or an ECG, it is common and non-invasive.

- Heart Monitor**,** or Holter Monitor, is a portable device that monitors your heart. It is small and you carry it with you at all times, monitoring your heart for a particular period of time, usually twenty-four to forty-eight hours. This gives the doctor a clear picture your heart and the ability to see patterns in the heart's function as you change activities throughout the day.

- Carotid Doppler is an ultrasound that detects narrowed and clogged carotid arteries which result from a build up of plaque and other things that are in your bloodstream, such as fat, cholesterol or calcium. This test has many uses, but in this case, the doctor will most likely be looking for anything that might disrupt the flow of blood to the heart and brain.

- Echocardiogram is another non-invasive test that uses sound waves to map the heart. The images produced allow the doctor to see things like the chambers of the heart, the size and shape of the heart, etc. This test is sometimes referred to as an "ECHO."

- Ambulatory Blood Pressure Monitor is another portable device that you wear, usually for twenty-four hours, including while sleeping. It is set to take your blood pressure at regular intervals, typically every twenty to thirty minutes.

The most important thing here is to collect as much information as you can before, during and after your dizziness or syncope episodes. Because there are so many possibilities, every bit of information can help.