



FAINTING WITH JERKING

What are faints?

"Syncope" is the medical word for fainting

Fainting is very common and most people normally recognise what they are when they have one or see one. They are often brought on by obvious causes like standing or pain (such as having blood taken). Fainting occurs more commonly in teenagers and older people. Less commonly known causes include urinating while standing (especially in the middle of the night) (micturition syncope) and eating.

Rarely fainting is due to more serious causes such as a heart abnormality, side effects from tablets, a problem with hormones or a problem with the nervous regulation of blood pressure.

Jerky Movements with Faints

Sometimes though, onlookers become alarmed when someone who has apparently fainted has jerky movements of their limbs that looks like an epileptic seizure.

These jerky movements are called 'myoclonus' and are usually an entirely normal event as part of a faint.

The video clip on www.neurodiagnosis.org shows a "freediver" who has held his breath so long underwater that he has fainted. The clip shows him unconscious because of the faint with his eyes open and some jerky movements of his arms for around 10 seconds. He regains consciousness very quickly in keeping with a simple faint.

Limb jerking after a faint is more common when the faint has been preceded by overbreathing or straining (Valsalva). Limb jerking with fainting should not last longer than thirty seconds although may do if the person remains seated or standing.

Important work by a German Neurologist, Thomas Lempert and colleagues showed that when medical students deliberately made themselves faint using these techniques, jerky movements were very common occurring around 80% of the time.

Other symptoms that commonly occur with fainting

Another common event during fainting is loss of bladder control (urinary incontinence). Occasionally the tongue can be bitten (more often the tip). Head injury can occur.

People can have other brief unusual experiences during faints as well including brief hallucinations, detachment or even out of body experiences.

When to seek referral

This website cannot give definitive advice about when to seek medical attention. You must consult your own doctor about fainting if you are concerned