CPNI
Cyprus Paediatric Neurology Institute
Παιδονευρολογικό Ινστιτούτο Κύπρου

LEAFLET FOR PARENTS AND PATIENTS

Faints and funny turns

Many children have episodes that look like seizures but are not epilepsy. The most common is a simple faint. Understanding exactly what happened helps us reach the right diagnosis and avoid unnecessary tests and treatment.

Common causes of funny turns

- Simple faints (vasovagal syncope)
- Breath-holding spells in toddlers, and reflex anoxic seizures
- Daydreaming and staring spells
- Sleep-related events, such as night terrors
- Tics and other movement episodes
- Migraine-related episodes
- Rarely, heart rhythm problems

Simple faints

- Often triggered by standing for a long time, heat, hunger, pain, the sight of blood or a sudden fright
- Beforehand the child may feel light-headed, hot or sick, look pale, or have blurred vision or muffled hearing
- They fall, and may jerk briefly for a few seconds, which can look like a seizure
- They usually come round within a minute or two, although they may feel tired afterwards

Breath-holding spells

- Common between 6 months and 5 years of age
- After crying, upset or a minor bump, the child holds their breath, turns blue or pale and may briefly lose consciousness
- They are frightening to watch but not harmful, and children grow out of them
- They are sometimes linked to low iron, so a blood test may be suggested

How we tell them apart from seizures

- ✓ A careful description of what happened before, during and after the episode
- ✓ A video, if it is safe to film, is very helpful
- ✓ An ECG (heart tracing) for children who faint
- ✓ An EEG only if a seizure is suspected
- ✓ Blood tests, such as iron levels, where appropriate

What to do during a faint

- ✓ Lie your child down and raise their legs
- ✓ Loosen tight clothing and let in fresh air
- ✓ When they come round, sit them up slowly and offer a drink and a snack
- ✓ Note what happened and how long it lasted

Preventing faints

- ✓ Drink plenty of water through the day
- ✓ Do not skip meals, especially breakfast
- ✓ At the first warning signs, sit or lie down straight away
- ✓ If standing for a long time, cross the legs and tense the leg muscles
- ✓ Avoid getting too hot

When to seek advice promptly

Please seek medical advice soon if an episode:

- Happens during exercise or swimming
- Is triggered by a loud noise, a fright or strong emotion
- Comes with chest pain or palpitations (a racing or irregular heartbeat)
- Lasts more than a few minutes, or recovery is slow
- Occurs in a child with a family history of sudden unexplained death at a young age or of heart rhythm problems

Episode diary

Fill in a line for each episode and bring this to your appointment.

Date and time	What happened before, during and after	How long

Contact CPNI

Has your child had funny turns? Call our office on +357 22 476 627 to arrange an assessment, or email cpni2007@gmail.com. We see children through GeSY, and privately if they are not GeSY beneficiaries, in Nicosia and Limassol.

More leaflets and information: www.cpni.com.cy

This leaflet gives general information. It does not replace advice from your child's doctor.

Reviewed by Dr Paola Nicolaides, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, November 2026.

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