

Tilt Table Test

The Tilt Table Test is used to determine a cause of syncope (fainting or loss of consciousness). The Tilt Table Test is performed to reproduce (bring on) symptoms of syncope while the person is being closely monitored. There can be different reasons people experience syncope. For some people it is related to an abnormal nervous system reflex causing the heart to slow and the blood vessels to dilate (open up), lowering the blood pressure. When this happens there is a reduced amount of blood to the brain causing one to faint. This type of syncope is called vasovagal, neurocardiogenic or abnormal vasoregulatory syncope and is considered benign (not dangerous or life-threatening), except for the injuries that can happen when one faints unexpectedly.

A trained technician will perform the test. You will be asked to lie down on a special examining table with safety belts and a footrest. An IV is inserted into one of your arms and a blood pressure cuff is attached to your other arm to monitor your blood pressure during the test. You are attached with electrodes (adhesive stickers) to an electrocardiograph (ECG) recorder to monitor your heart rate. For your safety, you are belted onto the tilt table. It is then tilted upright to a 60-80 degree vertical angle for a total of approximately 40 minutes. You are instructed to limit the movement of your legs and not to shift your weight during the test. You will also be asked to describe any symptoms you may be experiencing during the test.

If after 20 minutes you have not experienced syncope, a medication, usually nitroglycerin, given under your tongue, is administered while you are tilted again, for up to another 20 minutes. The medication dilates (opens) your arteries and veins and your heart rate and blood pressure continue to be monitored on how your body responds.

If you faint during the test, the table will be returned to a horizontal position and you will be continued to be monitored closely while you recover, which is usually immediate.

Typical symptoms of vasovagal or neurocardiogenic syncope include headache (especially after receiving nitroglycerin), nausea, sweatiness, pallor (pale in the face), lightheadedness, sensation of palpitations, near-fainting, and/or fainting. Symptoms frequently happen when standing for long periods or changing positions from lying down to standing.

Preparation for the Tilt Table Test

- No eating or drinking 4-6 hours prior to the test to limit symptoms of nausea/vomiting.
- Wear comfortable clothing
- Ask your physician if you need to discontinue any of your routine medications prior to the test
- Be prepared to have somebody drive you home

The Tilt Table Test is generally a safe test. You are closely monitored and belted safely onto the table. You may faint during the test. Most people recover once the table is lowered to a horizontal (flat) position. In rare cases a medication has to be administered to help increase the heart rate and blood pressure.