

After all vigorous exercise slow down gradually to prevent dizziness or fainting. Almost all athletes who collapse after finishing a marathon suffer from postural hypotension, which is a lack of blood flow to the brain because blood drops from the brain to the legs.

The treatment is to lie the person on his back, raise his feet high above his head and wait for him to revive. If he or she is not alert within seconds, you should consider the more serious causes of unconsciousness and get medical help immediately.

When you run, your heart pumps blood through your body, but it gets lots of help from your legs. When your leg muscles contract, they squeeze veins near them to push blood toward your heart. When your leg muscles relax, the veins near them fill with blood. This alternate contracting and relaxing of your leg muscles serves as a second heart. When you sprint toward the finish line, your leg muscles increase their pumping of blood. If you stop suddenly, the leg muscles stop pumping and blood pools in your legs, your brain doesn't get enough oxygen, and you pass out.

This is the reason you should always cool down slowly after vigorous exercise. If you slow down gradually, your leg muscles stop pumping gradually and your heart has time to pick up its share of the workload.

Many people believe that slowing down gradually helps to prevent muscle soreness by clearing lactic acid from muscles, but there is no evidence to support this theory. Muscle soreness after exercise is caused by small tears in the muscle fibres, not by accumulated lactic acid.

After lying down, stand up slowly, or dizziness can occur, especially if short of liquid (thirsty), so have a drink. Try to always (except when travelling or with no access to relieving) keep your moisture levels up.