Hello Alice,

Last night my husband was having bad stomach cramps. He went to the bathroom to have a bowel movement, and while there, he fainted. I heard the crash and ran to help. After what seemed like forever, he came to, and we got him up, let him rest, then he moved to the couch. I had him go to the ER to get checked out, which they found nothing... anyway, my question for you is: when he came from the bathroom, he mentioned he had a 'metal taste' in his mouth. I've heard of this before, but can't think of what it was I heard it could be. The Dr. at the ER didn't seem too concerned, but if you have any idea, I'd like to hear what it could have possibly meant. Thanks for your time...

Lisa

Answer

Dear Lisa,

Kudos to you for remaining calm and carefully tending to your husband during a nerve-wracking experience! To answer your question, only a trained medical provider who has seen your husband can pinpoint exactly what caused the metallic taste in his mouth. There are a variety of conditions which can cause the episode you described, with the most common being vasovagal syncope—a fainting episode due to the overstimulation of the vagus nerve. Other conditions which might result in fainting include chronic low blood pressure, dehydration, use of certain medications such as diuretics, and a variety of more serious conditions. Similarly, metallic tastes can arise due to a number of factors or conditions, each ranging in severity (more on those in a bit!), and some may potentially be related to why he fainted in the first place. As the health care provider that saw your husband in the emergency room didn't seem too concerned, it's possible that this may have been a one-time experience. That said, if you and your husband are still worried that something may be wrong, it may be reassuring to speak with another health care provider who could offer a second opinion.

Before getting into the metallic taste, it could be helpful to delve deeper into one potential cause, vasovagal syncope. In response to certain triggers (more on that in a moment), the vagus nerve will become overstimulated, which causes drops in the heart rate and blood pressure. When
heart rate and blood pressure drop, the brain receives less blood and oxygen, which can cause someone to faint. Some people are more sensitive to the stimulation of their vague nerve than others, and are more likely to have a fainting episode while urinating, sneezing, or having a bowel movement, during vigorous physical activity, or in response to a stressful situation.

For these people, it can be particularly valuable to pay attention to and avoid common triggers, including:

- Becoming overly tired, stressed, hungry, or dehydrated
- Standing for long periods of time without moving
- Getting up from a sitting or lying position too quickly
- Drinking or eating foods with caffeine
- Drinking alcohol

However, with all this information on vasovagal syncopes, it’s worth mentioning that they themselves aren’t likely to result in a metallic taste in the mouth. So, what could cause that? Potential factors or conditions which could lead to this taste include:

- **Blood**: Blood has a metallic taste due to its high iron content. If your husband hit his mouth or bit his cheek during his fainting spell, he may have been tasting residual blood.
- **An allergic reaction**: Food allergies may result in mild to severe reactions, some of which can include an immediate metallic taste in the mouth. Typically, during these reactions, people’s blood pressures drop, which can lead them to have pale skin or faint.
- **Medication**: Many drugs have side effects that include a metallic taste in the mouth, and can cause adverse reactions (e.g., fainting).
- **Dysgeusia**: This taste disorder is often associated with a foul, salty, rancid, or metallic taste in the mouth. Some people may be born with taste disorders or develop them after certain exposures including: a head injury, poor hygiene or dental problems, and exposure to certain chemicals.
- **Temporal lobe seizure**: These brief one-to-two minute seizures are often sudden and random, originating within the temporal lobe of the brain (roughly right above the ears), and can be due to a chronic disorder.

It could be that this was an isolated experience for your husband and may never happen again. Alternately, this episode could signal that he has a sensitive vagus or some other condition, which could trigger future episodes. If he has any other episodes, it’s useful to write down as much information as either of you can remember about the specific conditions at the time of the episode and later present this to his health care provider. Some questions to consider are: What was he doing when he fainted? What had he recently had to eat or drink? Was he drinking alcohol or taking medications? Had he recently been ill? Additionally, it’s crucial that he receive a thorough medical check-up to help identify the underlying cause. They may be able to offer some preventive measures or treatment if necessary.

Though this can be a scary experience, asking questions, learning more about what he experienced, and seeking out additional care if necessary might offer some reassurance. Your husband is fortunate to have you with him every step of the way.
Take care,

Alice!

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