

Classroom Accommodations for Students with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS)

Educators and parents must work together to come up with creative ways to help ensure the student's success. Accommodations should always be individualized to the student's specific issues. Each person is unique, but here are some typical accommodations that have been used to help students with POTS.

Symptom control while at school

Allow access to fluids throughout the day. Individuals with POTS do better when they are well hydrated.

Permit salty snacks throughout the day. Salt helps retain fluids and keep up blood volume and pressure.

Give a permanent bathroom pass. Frequent urination and stomach issues often accompany POTS.

Reduce long periods of standing. Accommodations may be needed for the lunch line, fire drills, outside recess, etc. Allow the student to sit down or recline when possible. Remaining upright worsens dizziness, fatigue, nausea, chest pain, fainting and other symptoms.

Permit a buddy pass as needed. A friend can help to carry books, supplies, and be on hand should the student become dizzy or lightheaded.

Permit use of postural counter maneuvers when seated and frequent repositioning of legs. Compensatory positions include elevating feet, sitting on knees, placing knees to chest, or sitting cross-legged.

Allow self regulation of body temperature. Consider allowing a portable fan and removal of outer layers of a uniform as heat exacerbates symptoms. Similarly, allow extra layers when the room is cold.

Allow the student to have a phone at all times. The student can get help immediately if lightheaded, dizzy, or had a fainting spell from the bathroom, hall, or school fields where an adult might not be present.

Unlimited access to the school nurse. The need will vary by the day and symptom severity.

Minimizing fatigue

Consider scheduling required classes in close proximity in a half day format. Many do not function well in the morning and may do better in the afternoon. Elective classes may be added as tolerated.

Allow extra time between classes to change rooms when long walks are required. If necessary, allow a wheelchair or other means of transportation.

Provide an elevator pass if student has classes on multiple floors.

Consider recess alternatives. Allow indoor recess with friends to minimize steps taken.

Modify or eliminate physical education. Many common exercises require standing, walking and running. Exercises in the lying or seated position are better tolerated and less likely to trigger health problems.

Noise and light sensitivity may also cause an issue. Wearing sunglasses or earplugs may be appropriate. Place the student in a seat out of the sunlight, and consider closing the blinds or dimming the lights.

Excuse student from pep rallies. If the student is light or noise sensitive, pep rallies can exacerbate fatigue. If the student attends, permit them to stay seated throughout the festivities.

Overcoming brain fog and issues with concentration

Be flexible with assignments and deadlines. Comprehension, deduction, memory storage and retrieval are often impacted by disrupted blood flow to the brain (brain fog), and some days are better than others.

Test taking may need to be modified. Tests should be administered in a quiet room. Options to elevate legs are important. Extended time, frequent breaks, and/or a scribe may improve performance.

Note taking may be difficult. Possible accommodations are assigning a buddy to take notes, allowing the student to tape the class, or having the teacher give the student a copy of the notes.

Allow a calculator for computations. Math that involves sequencing is often problematic with brain fog.

Excuse the student from testing or homework the day after hospitalization.

Dealing with Frequent Absences

Frequent absences are expected. Symptoms can change in severity daily. There should be no limit on absences allowed due to medical illness.

Prioritize core academics. There is a limited window when students with POTS are well enough to work. Reducing workload allows the student to complete major assignments in a timely manner.

Coordinate homework between teachers. If the student is homebound or partially homebound, send only priority work home to avoid overloading the student.

Allow tests and/or labs to be sent home to be overseen by the parent or a tutor.

For extended absences, provide a home tutor to help with difficult material.

Provide a set of books for home. This saves the student energy and is helpful when absent.

Taping of classes. Use of technology (Skype, podcasts) to allow students to hear instructions or explanations while at home can help the student keep up with their classes.

Socialization

Nip rumors about POTS. Communicate with the student's classmates about this invisible illness. Ostracism can occur quickly if there is skepticism about the reality of living with POTS.

Keep the level of disability private. Try not to pay special attention to the student in front of the class to promote an identity of "the sickly kid" or embarrass them.

Allow participation in all school activities. Chronically ill people already feel isolated. Feeling connected is critical to their emotional and social development.