

# Standing <sup>UP</sup> POTS

Dear School Nurse,

My child has been diagnosed with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS). In POTS, adolescents can suffer from a wide range of symptoms that are ultimately connected by the dysfunction of the autonomic “automatic” nervous system. Some symptoms are related to improper blood flow to the brain including dizziness, lightheadedness, headaches, cognitive impairments (brain fog), and fainting. Adolescents with POTS may also develop insomnia, fatigue, neuropathic pain, light, odor, and/or noise sensitivity, abdominal pain, temperature sensitivity, dehydration, and chest pain among others. POTS is estimated to affect 1% of teenagers.

POTS is an invisible illness that is not obvious. Some people with POTS will have swelling in the hands or feet, or mottling pattern in their skin. They are often prone to cold hands and feet. Otherwise, there are no obvious physical marking from POTS and many adolescents feel isolated and marginalized. **Please believe students when they come to you with these symptoms.**

**Tachycardia:** In adolescents, POTS is defined as an increase in heart rate  $>40$  beats per minute when standing compared with lying down. If your student comes to you with tachycardia, please have them lay down until their pulse returns to normal.

**Dehydration:** Those with POTS are susceptible to dehydration. They are advised to avoid prolonged heat exposure and direct sunlight, and should not exercise without sufficient hydration. If you suspect dehydration, give the student a salty snack and a sports drink with electrolytes. Have them recline as they re-hydrate.

Some people with severe POTS need to use IV saline to rehydrate. One liter of saline increases blood volume by 20% and can help to stabilize blood pressure and tachycardia.

**Fainting/Dizziness/Lightheadedness:** These are common symptoms for many adolescents with POTS. Have the student recline, and give a salty snack and electrolyte drink. If the student does not feel better, they should not be returned to class where they may fall and be injured. Please send them home for the day.

**Abdominal pain/headaches:** In some cases, these are best treated by having the student recline, re-hydrate, and administering ice packs to the abdomen or head as necessary. This often works faster than giving ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Many students with POTS are taking a variety of medications. Be sure that they have access to these medications at school and take them at the appropriate times.