

## Condition like 'running in place all the time '

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/buffalogrove/news/1083236,bg-rhum-073108-s2.article>)

July 31, 2008

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Nikki Rhum of Buffalo Grove was diagnosed with the serious health condition of postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome.

With POTS, your heart races when you stand. Symptoms may also include migraines, trouble exercising and feeling like you are going to pass out.

POTS, a varied group of disorders with similar clinical characteristics, involves a disturbance of the autonomic nervous system, which controls the body's automatic functions like heartbeat and breathing.

With POTS, "too much blood is sequestered where it shouldn't be," said Dr. Blair Grubb, a specialist in autonomic disorders at the University of Toledo Medical Center and one of Rhum's doctors.

You feel tired, light-headed and like you can't focus, he said.

POTS is a form of dysautonomia, a group of complex conditions involving dysregulation of the autonomic nervous system. Studies have shown that the quality of life for a person with a form of dysautonomia can be similar to that of a person suffering from congestive heart failure, according to the Dysautonomia Youth Network of America Inc., a group serving young people with these conditions.

Symptoms vary in severity. Each dysautonomia case is different, which can make it difficult to diagnose, according to the network.

The tell-tale symptom of POTS is a heart that races upon standing. When a person stands, gravity tries to displace about a fourth of her blood volume to the lower half of her body, Grubb said.

While healthy people have compensatory mechanisms (like blood vessel constriction) to bring blood back to the upper half of the body, a person with POTS lacks effective mechanisms. Usually the person's heart beats faster and harder to try to offset the blood displacement and while it's enough to keep them from fainting, it involves a lot of energy, Grubb said.

"It's as if you're running in place all the time."

Causes of POTS vary. In adults, 70 percent of cases result after a viral infection. It can also come secondary to another condition like type 1 diabetes or an autoimmune problem, Grubb said.

In children, the onset of POTS symptoms generally occurs around age 14 or 15, usually following a period of rapid growth. Girls are five times as likely to get it as boys. POTS in children can come after a viral infection, a surgery or just happen out of nowhere, said Grubb, noting: "The autonomic system in some people doesn't keep up with the rapidity with which someone grows."

About 80 percent of children eventually outgrow POTS symptoms and have improved dramatically by their mid-20s, Grubb said. The condition is rarely fatal but is disabling. Adults who develop POTS after a virus are more slow to recover, he said.

POTS is hard to diagnose because the average pediatrician is only going to see one case every couple of years, Grubb said. Also there are only a few centers around the country that specialize in treating autonomic disorders.

"Once you know what to look for, then it's easy to spot," he said.