

Orthostatic Intolerance and Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Self-Care Checklist

1. Identify and avoid your triggers

a. Physical triggers:

- Extreme heat, hot showers/baths.
- Standing up quickly or for long periods.
- Holding arms up for an extended time.
- Lifting objects over 10–15 pounds.
- Climbing long flights of stairs.
- Donating blood.

b. Food/beverage triggers:

- Getting dehydrated.
- Caffeine (especially energy drinks).
- Extra-large meals, especially high carbohydrate or sugar meals.
- Alcohol.
- Foods high in gluten or other allergens.

c. Psychological triggers:

- Stress at home or work; (note that POTS is not just anxiety and is not caused by anxiety).

2. Learn short-term 'countermeasures' to control acute onset of symptoms

a. Standing:

- Cross and squeeze legs and buttocks; Squat; Do calf raises, Stand with one leg on a chair.
- Shift weight side-to-side, bounce on your toes, fidget, walk in place.
- Bend slightly forward from the waist (such as leaning over a shopping cart).

b. Sitting:

- With knees tucked to your chest.
- With feet propped/elevated.
- Leaning forward with hands on the knees.

c. Lying down:

- With feet propped up on a chair or against a wall; pumping your feet helps even more. Try not to lie still for a long time, as this can make POTS symptoms worse.

d. Other:

- Before sitting or standing up, pump the ankles, then tense and release your thighs, then your buttocks; Squeeze a ball to pump your arms.
- Take deep belly breaths to help return fluids to your heart. Inhale against resistance (like sucking in air through a straw). Cough.
- Cool your skin with a water mister or cold wet cloth on your face. Finish showers with cool water.

3. Implement long term prevention/self-care

a. Food/beverage strategies

- Drink lots of fluid and electrolytes (100 ounces, or 3L, per day). Avoid sugary drinks.
- Eat lots of salt (8-10 grams per day) and/or use an electrolyte supplement.
- Eat small, frequent meals (with salt); avoid high sugar/carbohydrate foods.

b. Physical strategies

- Get up and move around frequently throughout your day. This decreases blood pooling.
- Practice deep, diaphragmatic breathing at least once a day, preferably more often.
- Use compression socks/stockings (20-40 mmHg, waist high works best) or an abdominal binder.
- Participate in an appropriate exercise program. Some people need to start in a reclined position and focus on leg and core strength. (i.e.: recumbent bike, swimming, row machine, leg machines). Progress gradually.
- Place 6" blocks under the head of your bed; this helps you retain fluid overnight.

c. Psychological strategies

- Relaxation practice through diaphragmatic breathing, meditation, biofeedback, etc.