



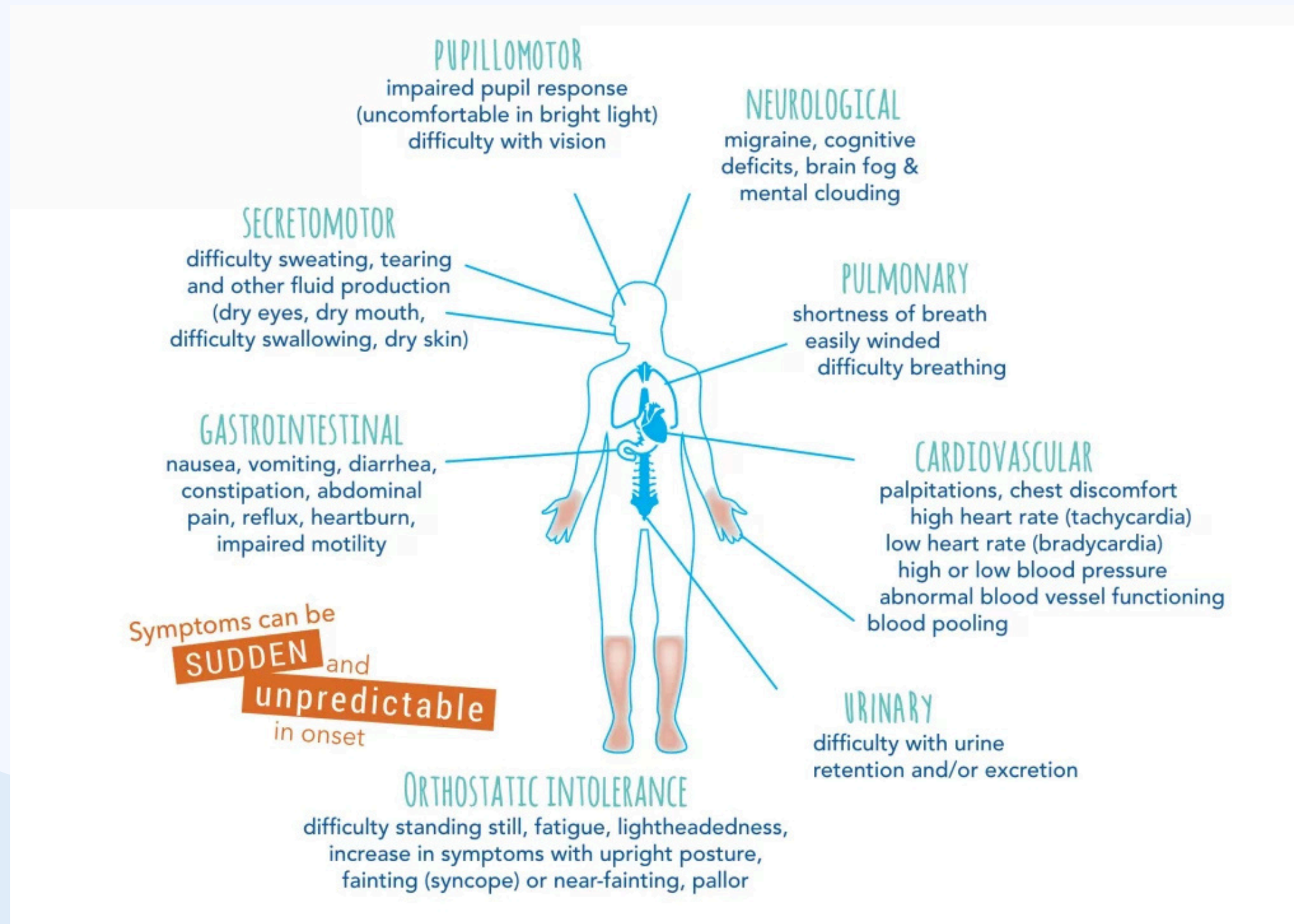
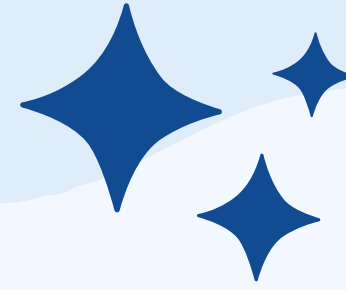
DYSAUTONOMIA AND WELLNESS

Ryenn Nunley

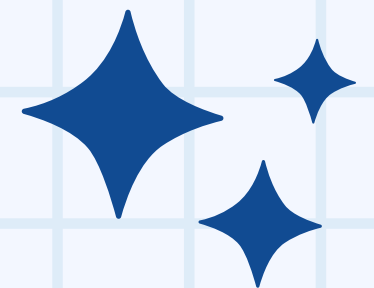
WHAT IS DYSAUTONOMIA?

- Dysautonomia is a term for disorders causing dysfunction of the autonomic nervous system (ANS).
- "It is estimated that 70 million people worldwide have some form of autonomic dysfunction." - The Dysautonomia Project
- Dysautonomia is a descriptor or umbrella term for several disorders of the ANS, including POTS.
- It can also be "secondary," meaning it is occurring because of another disorder, such as diabetes.

COMMON SYMPTOMS



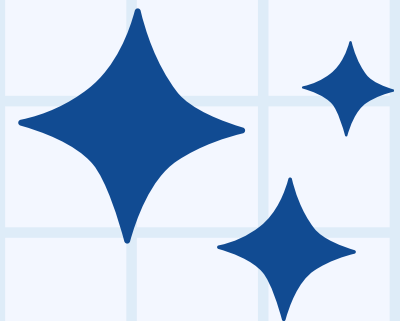
- *Dysautonomia affects a lot of systems in the body*
- *Different people experience different combinations of these symptoms*
- *No one individual experience is the same*



MY EXPERIENCE



Me and my Mama :)



- I was diagnosed with dysautonomia in March of 2026.
- My biggest concern for seeking medical help was syncope (fainting) once every few years.
- I have always had a hard time with dizziness when standing up, migraines, brain fog, fatigue, palpitations, back and shoulder pain, nausea, and a lot of other small, daily complaints that would take a long time to list out.

MY PROCESS OF GETTING DIAGNOSED

- It took me a long time to get diagnosed, even after my symptoms began.
- I saw a doctor in my hometown who did some testing and told me to change my diet.
- A doctor here at AU told me it was common among young girls ages 12 to 17, and a specialist would tell me I was normal.
- None of this felt right. I knew something bigger was wrong.

- The AU doctor sent me to a cardiologist, who reviewed the tests my doctor at home had ordered and performed a few tests of his own.
- The specialist asked me a few questions and then told me he thinks I have dysautonomia!
- He explained to me what it is and what it means and gave me a few ways to treat it.


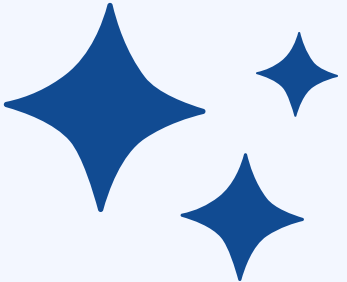



Me, getting tests done at my doctor at home



THE EXPERIENCES OF OTHERS

Some other people close to me have had similar rocky experiences on their way to getting diagnosed.



JAE

My little brother Jae was told by our family doctor that he was experiencing abnormal UTIs when he would have periods of fatigue and orthostatic intolerance. When he visited the urologist, they sent him to a cardiologist instead who diagnosed him with POTS.



CLAIRE

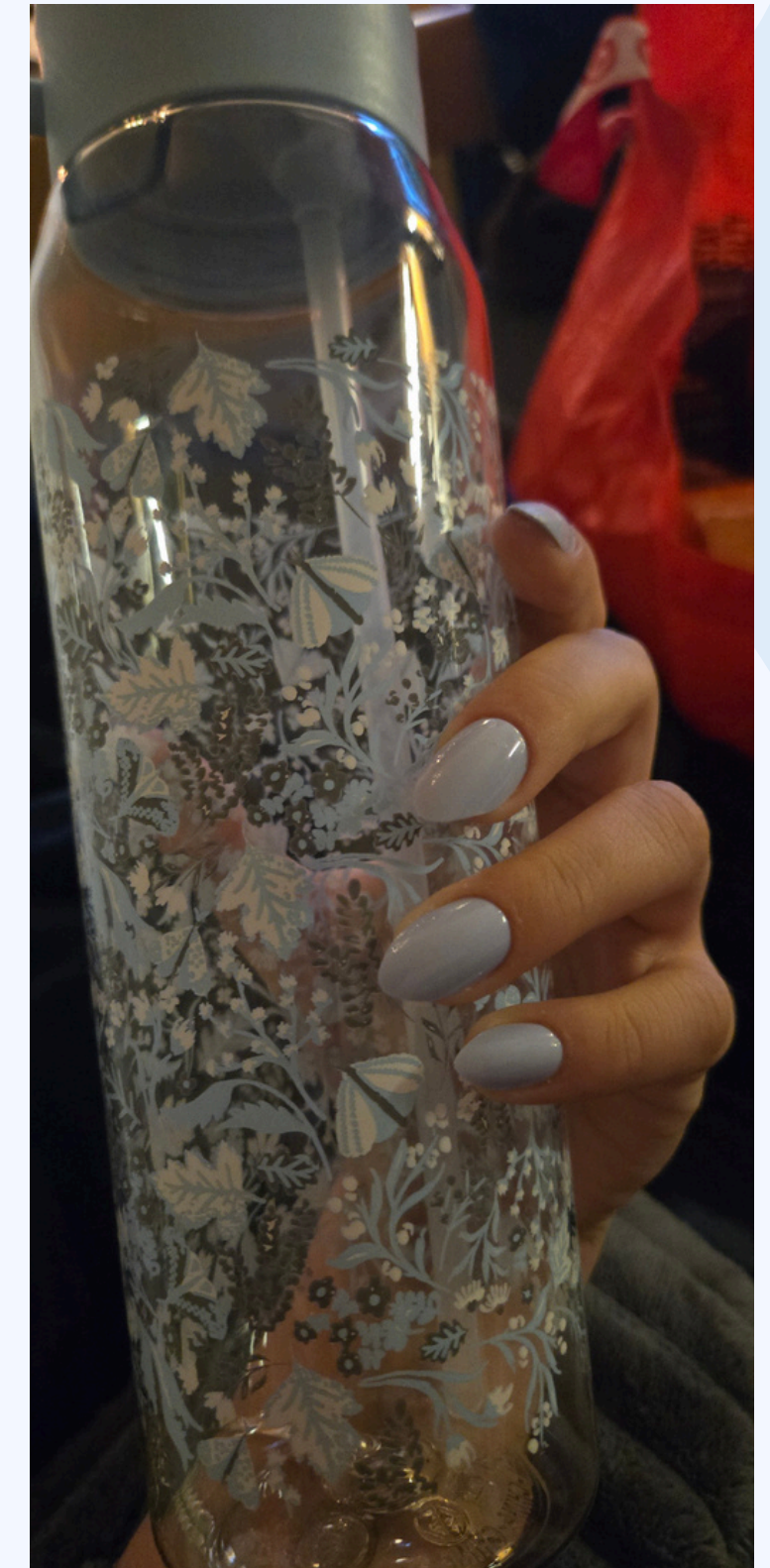
My friend Claire has told me about when she got diagnosed and how grateful she was to have her mom with her to advocate for her when doctors told her she was normal, similar to the response I got.

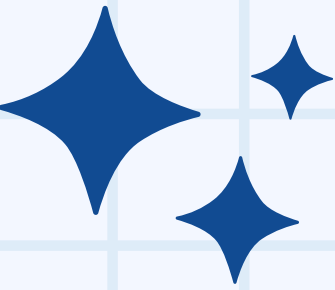
TREATMENT

- Even after struggling to get diagnosed, some people struggle with clarity in their treatment plan
- A lot of people with dysautonomias' chief complaint is related to low blood pressure.
- Because of this, many doctors recommend patients drink 2-3 liters of water a day and increase their salt intake to 5-6 grams a day (Kimbrell 2025).
- However, a lot of doctors never give a specific number, and patients are left guessing how much they need.

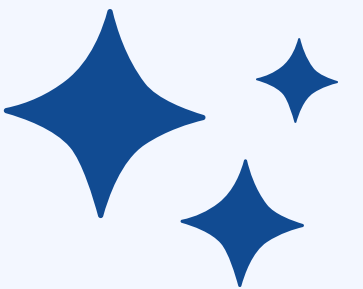
MY ATTEMPTS AT TREATMENT AND WELLNESS

- Drinking more water!
 - I bought a new, clear water bottle to encourage drinking more water.
- Salt
 - I already eat more salt than the normal person, but I started making sure I carry it with me
- Swimming
 - I was hoping that swimming would increase my cardio capacity and help me get fit!
- Metric Tracking
 - I got a Garmin watch and a blood pressure cuff to track how my treatment was working
- Pacing myself
 - I started trying to be aware of how I was feeling and not push past what I can handle





DID IT WORK??

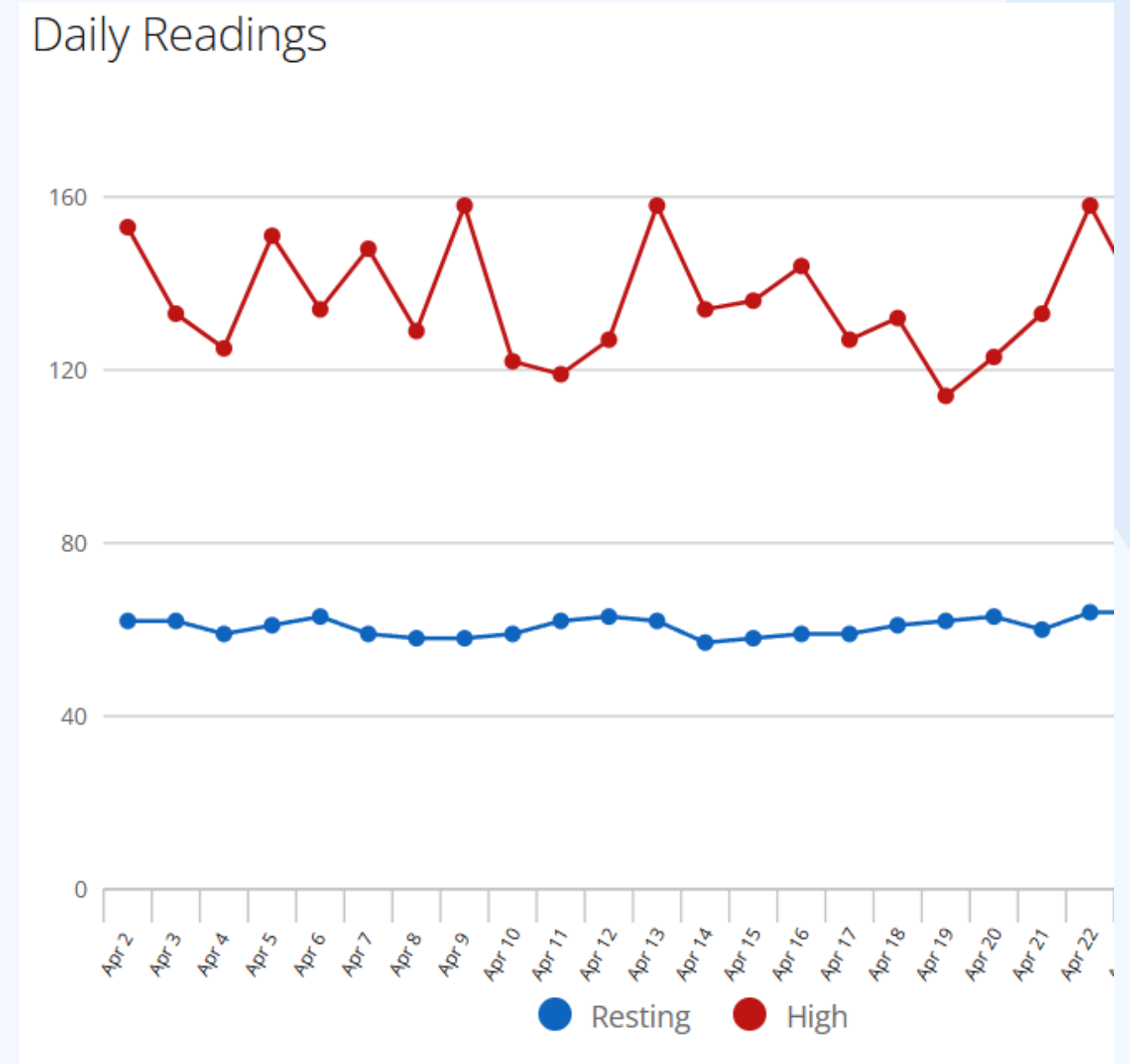


WHAT DID HELP!!

- Drinking more water!
 - I've definitely started drinking more water. I still often don't even drink 32 oz of straight water in a day, or even over a few days. I do notice a worsening in symptoms during those times and notice fewer symptoms when I drink about 2 liters of water in a day.
- Salt
 - Eating salt does help! I haven't deliberately tried to add more salt to my general diet, but I have noticed that if I eat some salt or add extra to my food when I'm feeling off, maybe having brain fog, or a headache, sometimes the symptoms subside

GARMIN BMP STATS

- My Garmin Watch tracks my heart rate highs and lows every day. The app then creates a chart of my highest and lowest of every day. The chart to the right shows data for four weeks.
- The days that spiked really high, up to 160 bpm, were days when I hadn't had enough water.
- I have found that days when I stay in the 120-130 bpm range as my max are days when I have been taking good care of myself.
- Overall, the Garmin watch has been really helpful in keeping track of my overall health and wellness!

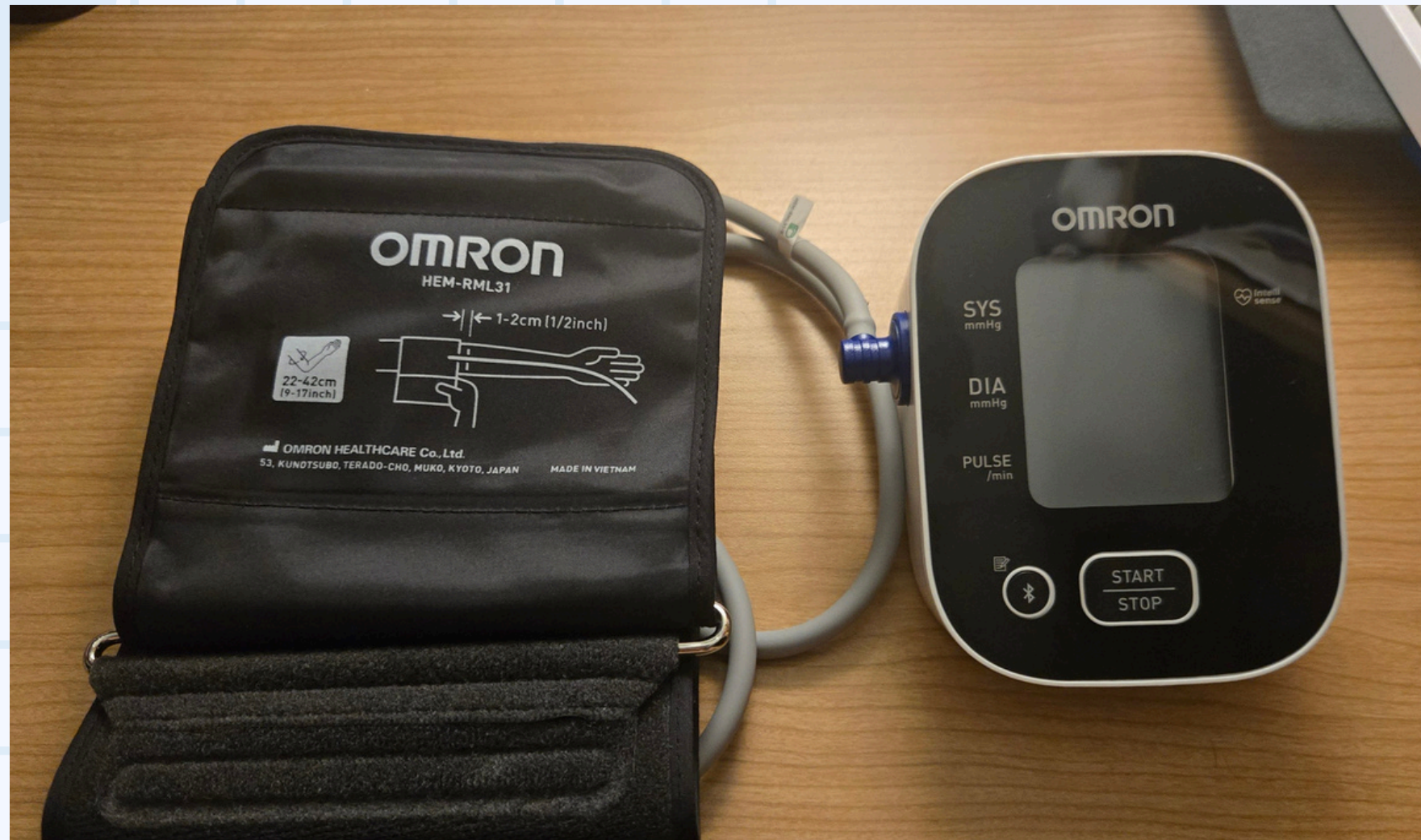


SORT OF HELPED!

- *Swimming*
 - *I have for sure noticed that I have gotten better at swimming. I'm able to swim longer and further without breaks and without feeling like "my heart is working too hard" (which is how I explain what it feels like when my bpm is really high).*
 - *I have not yet noticed that swimming has improved my overall well-being or helped my daily life. I'm hoping that over time that will change!*



FAILURES



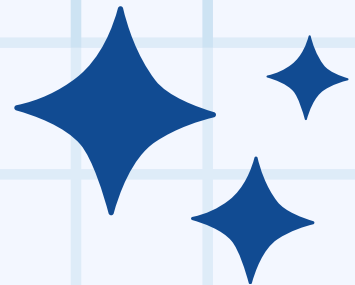
- Blood Pressure Tracking
 - It is ridiculously difficult to use a blood pressure cuff on your own. Getting the cuff evenly around your own arm is hard, and the process takes a long time. Remembering to take my blood pressure twice a day is also really hard for me.
 - I think I only took the measurements, like, actually 3 times.

STRUGGLES

- Pacing
 - I had a very difficult time making sure I didn't push myself when I was already tired, and sometimes identifying when I was tired.
 - Long to-do lists, assignments, chores, and classes all add up to having a lot of things I feel I need to do before I can rest.
 - In trying to learn to listen to my body, and when I needed rest, I experienced a lot of guilt and pressure, but I also felt like it was the single most helpful thing for my wellness when I did manage to advocate for myself and my rest time.

WHY PACING IS DIFFICULT FOR ME

"The Rat Race" is a phrase that I'm certain a lot of people are familiar with. In the 1940's, it began to describe the relentless push for success people felt in the workforce. In my personal experience, it has also permeated into schooling.



In high school, I was always pushing myself to do more. I was SO busy. I was in the theater, the advanced orchestra, and the advanced choir. I was the secretary of my high school's Future Business Leaders of America chapter. I graduated in the top 10 of my class and earned a Drafting Certification from the community college. As much as I enjoyed everything I did, it never felt like I could slow down.





ACHIEVEMENT CULTURE

- I often felt like all the things I was doing were just expected of me, and I heard from many of my peers that they were experiencing a very similar sense of pressure, whether the goal was to get into college, graduate in the top ten, or just "be the best".
- Researchers at the American Psychological Association and York University have been studying the trends of "...an achievement culture that involves a sense of needing to be perfect, that seems to be becoming more salient and more widespread" (Sohn 2024).
- This culture of perfectionism is putting a lot of pressure on adults, adolescents, and children alike, from more internal pressure and more pressure from each other.



WHY WORRY ABOUT IT?

- Isn't achieving things good? Motivation is a good thing! Well, yes and no.
- You can have too much of a good thing! Wanting to succeed is a good thing, but when your expectations are unreasonable, or you don't allow yourself the time to rest that your mind and body biologically need, it can lead to low self-worth, depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation (Sohn 2024).
- Some studies even suggest that overwork, neglect of personal well-being, and perfectionism reduce productivity, so sometimes in the effort to get so much done, people actually suppress their potential! (Litchfield et al. 2016)

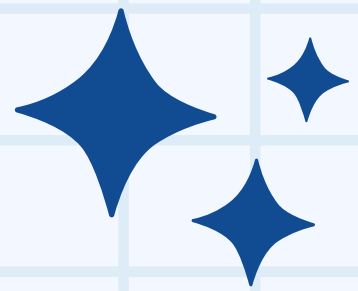


BUT RYENN, WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH DYSAUTONOMIA?

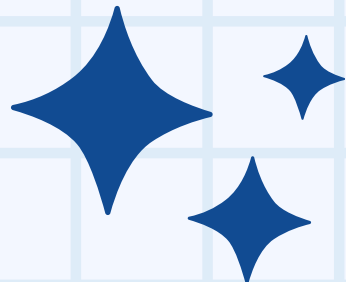
- Everything!!
- Resting, taking care of yourself, and being kind and realistic with your expectations are really important for everyone, whether they fit the typical idea of "healthy" or not.
- However, it is particularly important for people with dysautonomia, or other energy-draining disorders.
- With dysautonomia, it is super important to monitor your energy and not overdo it or go past your capacity. Resisting the pull of the Achievement Culture and learning to monitor your activity and productivity levels on your own scale, not anyone else's, is absolutely paramount to health and wellness.



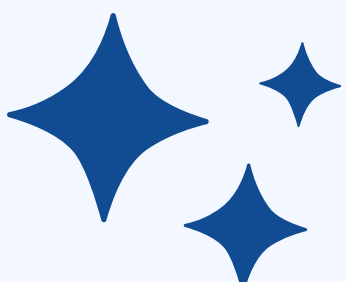
TAKE AWAYS



- Learn to listen to your body! Do what works for you, drink the amount of water you need, and eat some salt if you need to. You can even put it on weird foods if you want!
- Advocate for yourself! Whether in a medical setting or when you need rest, make sure you are getting what you need.
- Surround yourself with kind people who will understand your needs.
- It's a lot of trial and error. Try stuff, experiment, take notes, figure out your own system.
- Have compassion! For yourself and the people around you :)



WORKS CITED



Kimbrell, Adam. "Dysautonomia." *The Dysautonomia Project*, 23 Oct. 2025, thedysautonomiaproject.org/dysautonomia/.

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Litchfield, Paul et al. "Work and Wellbeing in the 21st Century." *International journal of environmental research and public health* vol. 13,11 1065. 31 Oct. 2016, doi:10.3390/ijerph13111065