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Long Q-T Syndrome

Definition

The Long Q-T syndrome (LQTS) is a form of inherited heart disease that exists from birth. Q-T refers to the portion of the cardiac complex on the ECG that extends from the beginning of the Q wave to the end of the T wave. This segment lasts slightly longer in the Long Q-T syndrome than is normal. The cause of the syndrome is a mutation in a gene that regulates the heart's electrical system.

This syndrome can result in sudden death among school athletes, as well being a factor in unexplained drownings. It is characterized by life-threatening heart rhythm problems, especially when emotional or physical stress exists. The heart muscle starts beating so rapidly and so ineffectively that the blood stops circulating.

Symptoms

Symptoms of Long Q-T syndrome include:

- fainting
- dizziness
- palpitations
- seizures.

Complications

Long Q-T syndrome is sometimes confused with epilepsy. Also, some people with LQTS have few or no symptoms, but they are still at risk. These situations can have serious complications, in that the first indication of the real problem can be sudden cardiac death.

Signs and Tests

Your healthcare provider will consider the possibility of LQTS from your description of your symptoms and from your family history. If individuals in your family have unexplained fainting spells, the physician may suspect the existence of the disease. An electrocardiogram (ECG) can also be a helpful test.

Treatment

One or more of the following treatments may be applied:

- beta blockers to reduce heart rhythm problems
- a pacemaker to set the heart's rhythm

- an automatic defibrillator to detect and correct an abnormal heart rhythm
- surgery to interrupt nerve supply to the heart.

Prognosis (Expectations)

The prognosis for LQTS is good. With treatment, most people can engage in physical activity and handle stress without heart rhythm problems. Children with LQTS should not engage in competitive sports and should stop any physical activity if they experience LQTS symptoms.

Tips

- Call your physician promptly if have LQTS and experience spells of light-headedness or fainting. You should also be in touch if you feel your heart racing for short spells.

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