

# Run set to aid teen Lyme disease sufferer

By **LISA TALLYN**  
Staff Writer

It's been a difficult few years for Vanessa McCracken, a 16-year-old Georgetown girl, who has Lyme disease.

After suffering pain, weakness, fatigue and seizures it took nearly three years before she was finally diagnosed with the

tick-borne illness. The family has had to go to the U.S. to get the treatment Vanessa needs, but the good news is that it appears to be working as Vanessa hasn't had a seizure for eight weeks now.

But the large quantities of antibiotics she has to take have taken a toll on her. She's only been able to go to school two days so far this school year.

She feels ill much of the time, particularly when she has a die-off of the bacteria, her hair has fallen out and her immune system is so compromised that she easily catches other illnesses.

"The side effects are horrendous," said Vanessa's mom Gail. "I don't know the last time she ate without throwing up in a day."

The family has no coverage for the expensive U.S. treatment and Gail's cousins are hosting a fundraiser, 'Run for Vanessa' on Saturday (March 31) to help alleviate some of the financial burden.

Stacy Chaytor and Erika Lefebvre are holding the fun 1 km/5km Run/Walk beginning at the Barbertaine Pub, 360 Guelph St. Registration starts at 9:15 a.m., and the run will begin at 10 a.m.

The entry fee is \$20 for adults, \$10 for those aged 8 to 18, \$5 for those 7 and under, and \$50 per family. For more information on the event, to become a participant, make a donation, or download a pledge form visit [www.cousinshelpingcousins.com/](http://www.cousinshelpingcousins.com/)

Gail said, looking back, she believes her daughter contracted Lyme disease when she was in Grade 5 at a soccer tournament in West Virginia. She was at the tournament with another family and she and the other girls had been playing in the woods. Vanessa fell ill while there, but at the time they figured it was due to heat stroke.

Gail said they realize now that Vanessa never really recovered fully from the illness, but generally everything was fine until two years later when she had a seizure.



**VANESSA MCCRACKEN AND BOWSER**

She was put on epilepsy medication that seemed to work for some time. But then she started having seizures almost every day. Gail said her doctor switched her medication, but she continued to have seizures.

Vanessa had to miss a lot of school and was in and out of hospital, suffered concussions because she fell after having a seizure and at one point fell down the stairs, dislocating her shoulder.

"Then I ran into a friend at the grocery store who said his sister had been diagnosed with Lyme disease," said Gail. She said Vanessa had a lot of similar symptoms.

Vanessa was tested for Lyme disease, but the test came back negative.

After talking to some friends, however, they suggested she be tested in the U.S., so they visited a naturopath who arranged for that testing, which came back positive.

Vanessa is seeing a doctor in New York state and is being treated with both antibiotics and herbal supplements.

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