



Tics and Tourette Syndrome

Learn the facts about tics and Tourette syndrome (TS) so that you can recognize the signs and get a child with TS the right support early on.

What is Tourette syndrome?

Tourette syndrome (TS) is a condition of the nervous system. TS causes people to have “tics.” Tics are sudden twitches, movements, or sounds that people do repeatedly.

Having tics is a little bit like having hiccups. Even though you might not want to hiccup, your body does it anyway. Sometimes people can stop themselves from doing a certain tic for a while, but it’s hard. Eventually the person has to do the tic.

What are the types of tics?

There are two types of tics—motor and vocal:

- **Motor Tics:** Motor tics are movements of the body. Examples of motor tics include blinking, shrugging the shoulders, or jerking an arm.
- **Vocal Tics:** Vocal tics are sounds that a person makes with his or her voice. Examples of vocal tics include humming, clearing the throat, or yelling out a word or phrase.

Tics can be either simple or complex:

- **Simple Tics:** Simple tics involve just a few parts of the body. Examples of simple tics include squinting the eyes or sniffing.
- **Complex Tics:** Complex tics usually involve several different parts of the body and can have a pattern. An example of a complex tic is bobbing the head while jerking an arm and then jumping up.

Who is affected?

Studies estimate that 1 in 162 children has TS. TS can affect people of all racial and ethnic groups. Boys are more likely than girls to be diagnosed with TS.

Living with TS can impact a person’s health, education, employment, family relationships and friendships, and has wide-ranging impact on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Children with TS often need many healthcare visits, special educational services, medication, and psychological and behavioral counseling. It is important to recognize TS early so that children can get the right treatment and support.



How is TS diagnosed?

There is no single test, like a blood test, to diagnose TS. Health professionals look at the person's symptoms to see whether someone has TS or another tic disorder. If someone has tics for a short time, it might be a provisional tic disorder. If someone has either motor or vocal tics for more than a year, they might have a persistent tic disorder. TS is diagnosed if a person has both motor and vocal tics and has had tics for at least a year.

How does TS develop?

Tic symptoms usually begin when a child is 5 to 10 years of age. The first symptoms often are motor tics that occur in the head and neck area. Tics usually are worse during times that are stressful or exciting. They tend to improve when a person is calm or focused on an activity.

The types of tics, and how often a person has tics, often change over time. Even though the symptoms might appear, disappear, and reappear, these conditions are considered chronic.



In most cases, tics decrease during adolescence and early adulthood, and sometimes disappear entirely. However, many adults with TS continue to experience some tics and, in some cases, tics can become worse in adulthood.

Although the media often portrays people with TS as involuntarily shouting out swear words (called coprolalia), these symptoms are not required for a diagnosis of TS. Most people with TS do not experience swearing or other socially inappropriate tics.

How is TS treated?

Many people with TS have tics that do not get in the way of their daily life, and therefore do not need any treatment. However, if tics cause pain or injury, interfere with school, work, or social life, or cause stress, there are treatments available to help manage the tics. Effective treatment includes behavioral treatment like Comprehensive Behavioral Intervention for Tics (CBIT) and medication.

What are other concerns and conditions?

TS often occurs with other conditions. Most children diagnosed with TS also have been diagnosed with at least one additional mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and anxiety. It is important to find out if a person with TS has any other conditions, and treat those conditions properly.

What are the risk factors and causes?

Doctors and scientists do not know the exact cause of TS. Research suggests that it is an inherited genetic condition. That means it is passed on from parent to child through genes.

Where can you go for help?

Visit the website of the Tourette Association of America (www.tourette.org) to find information, resources, newsletters, videos, and more regarding diagnosis, treatment, and living with TS.

Additional Information:

www.cdc.gov/tourette

800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

www.cdc.gov/info

cdc.gov/tourette