

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 help 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. People who have tics cannot stop their body from doing these things. For example, a person might keep blinking over and over again. Or, a person might make a grunting sound unwillingly.

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.



Who is affected?

In the United States, 1 of every 333 children 6 through 17 years of age has been diagnosed with TS. TS can affect people of all racial and ethnic groups. TS is more common among boys than girls.

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.

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.

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. TS can be diagnosed if a person has both motor and vocal tics, and has had those tic symptoms for at least a year. If someone has one or the other kind of tic for more than a year, or both kinds for a short time, they might have a tic disorder instead. Simple tics that don’t last long are pretty common, and don’t necessarily mean that there is a disorder.

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 people with TS experience tics into adulthood and, in some cases, tics can become worse during adulthood.

Although the media often portray people with TS as involuntarily shouting out swear words (called coprolalia) or constantly repeating the words of other people (called echolalia), these symptoms are rare, and are not required for a diagnosis of TS.

How is TS treated?

Although there is no cure for TS, there are treatments available to help manage the tics. 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, medication and behavioral treatments like the [Comprehensive Behavioral Intervention for Tics \(CBIT\)](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/tourette/treatments.html#CBIT) <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/tourette/treatments.html#CBIT> are available if tics cause pain or injury; interfere with school, work, or social life; or cause stress.

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), anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). 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](http://tourette.org/) <http://tourette.org/> to find information, resources, newsletters, videos, and more regarding diagnosis, treatment, and living with TS.

Additional Information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/tourette>
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636); <http://www.cdc.gov/info>