



Tourette's Syndrome (TS)

- FAQs

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What is Tourette's Syndrome (TS)?

Tourette's Syndrome (TS) is a complex neurological condition, characterised by sudden, involuntary movements and/or sounds called tics. TS is a spectrum condition; at one end of the spectrum, tics could be mild and not impact on a person's day to day life, whilst at the other end of the spectrum, tics can be distressing and disabling.

What causes Tourette's Syndrome?

The exact cause of TS isn't yet known, but current research indicates it involves a part of the brain called the basal ganglia and a dysfunction of the neurotransmitters (chemical messengers in the brain). There's strong evidence to suggest it is a hereditary condition.

Is Tourette's Syndrome rare?

No. It is estimated that prevalence is similar to that of ASD, at 1.1%. Meaning that 1 in every 100 school-aged children have diagnosable TS.

What are tics?

Tics are chronic (long-term) repetitive and involuntary sounds and movements. Tics usually start at around the age of seven years, and some people may see their symptoms disappear as they get older. For others, however, tics will remain into adulthood. A person can have lots of different types of tics. Some may stay and others may change over time.



What are vocal tics?

Vocal tics are unwanted and involuntary noises. These can include things like sniffing, throat clearing, whistling, squeaking, humming, coughing, and screaming. Sometimes tics can be full words or even sentences.

What about swearing?

Most people with Tourette's don't swear. This symptom of TS only affects approximately 10-15% of people. The correct name for this is Coprolalia.

Is Tourette's associated with any other conditions?

More than 85% of people with TS have more than just tics. Co-occurring conditions (sometimes called co-morbidities) can include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Anxiety and Depression.



How is Tourette's Syndrome diagnosed?

Two or more motor tics and at least one vocal tic must be present over a period of a year without a break of more than three months for a diagnosis of Tourette's Syndrome.

Ignore? Acknowledge? Discourage?

Tics are involuntary movements and it is helpful for a person to be able to tic when they need to. Tics are not caused by behaviour and cannot be disciplined away. If a person feels unable to tic, for example due to being in a busy environment, in school, at work etc, they may be able to suppress their tics. Suppressing tics is exhausting and takes a lot of energy and concentration. Bringing attention to tics can make a person feel self-conscious and can prompt further tics, so it's more helpful to ignore the tic wherever possible. However, it is important for families to be able to talk freely about Tourette's and how it may impact on the individual.

What makes tics worse?

Things like stress, anxiety, excitement and tiredness often negatively impact tics. Some people find that certain foods and drinks increase their tics, especially those that contain caffeine and artificial colours or preservatives. Some people find that seasonal changes impact their tics.

What makes tics better?

Being in an environment where people understand TS will have a positive impact on tics. Some people find that their tics reduce when they're engaged or absorbed in certain activities; this may be something like playing sport, swimming, drawing, singing or something else the person finds engaging.