

What can you do to help?

Although you can't stop the tics, there are things you can do to help the person experiencing them:

Ignoring the tics – if you see your child displaying tics, don't point them out, and instead ignore them carry on as normal

Be patient – this can be difficult, especially at times when your child is struggling to complete a sentence or carry out an activity due to their tics, but please try to be as patient as you can – it will pass

People with tics often replace them with new ones, your child is likely aware of this, so don't point them out, they probably already feel self-conscious

If you see your child having a tic fit, and you can clearly see that it is being brought on by a stressful situation, if at all possible offer to take your child out of that situation. However, it's important not to make a big deal out of this, so it might be worth suggesting a break, or some fresh air by saying something like 'I'm getting a bit hot in here, I'm going to go and get some fresh air, would you like to come with me?' or 'you seem a bit anxious/overwhelmed/stressed, would you like to talk about what's on your mind?'

Distracting them can also work so you can try asking them a question such as 'what would you like for tea?' or 'do you know what time it is?' etc

Take their tics seriously – don't make jokes or comments about them, or tell them that they are making a scene – they likely already know that people are watching, don't add to their embarrassment/paranoia, and if you see someone making derogatory comments about your child, defend them, and if appropriate – educate them

Ask school to be mindful and watch out for bullying, or any situations that are particularly triggering for your child and try and make allowances where possible.

Tourette's and Tics Information



The Lotus Mental Health

www.thelotusmentalhealth.org

What is Tourette's Syndrome and what are tics?

Tourette's syndrome is a condition that affects the nervous system and causes people to make sudden and often repeated movements, noises, sounds, and/or twitches – also known as tics. These tics cannot be stopped by the person experiencing them, and the sounds and movements are often made unwillingly.

To try and understand the nature of tics, it's similar to having the hiccups – you might not want to hiccup, but your body will still do it. You can try and fight it, but ultimately, you don't have much control over them.

There are two types of tics – vocal and motor.

Vocal - Vocal tics are sounds that a person makes using their voice – this can be humming, grunting, clearing their throat, blurting out random words/phrases, and shouting.

Motor – Motor tics are physical movements such as moving their limbs – such as pushing an arm out or shrugging their shoulders, or facial movements such as blinking, moving their nose – maybe in a 'sniffing' movement, or neck/jaw movements.

The tics that a person experiences can either be simple or complex. Simple tics include movements such as squinting their eyes, or stretching their neck, and complex tics tend to involve different parts of the body moving in a pattern. For example, someone who has complex tics might shake their head, stomp a foot, and raise their arms upwards – one after the other.

Tourette's syndrome and tics

Tics tend to begin when a child is aged between 5 – 10 years and often start as facial/head/neck motor movements. You or perhaps a teacher at school might have noticed that your child has been squinting their eyes during lessons and suggested having your child's eyes tested. If you do, and their eyesight is fine, the movements could be down to tics.

Tics can last for a few days, weeks, or months, or they can be more complex and last for much longer. The tics a person displays can change regularly over time, they can be worse at some times, but then disappear altogether, only to then come back again, which is why Tourette's and tics are considered to be a chronic condition.

In many cases, tics get worse during adolescence and into early adulthood. In some cases they can disappear completely, and in others they can continue into adulthood and sometimes they can become worse as a person gets older.

Due to media portrayals, people often associate Tourette's and tics with swearing, or saying offensive phrases but in reality, that is very rare, and calling out swear words or repeating offensive words/phrases are not part of the Tourette's/tics diagnosis process.

Tics aren't usually harmful to the sufferer's health, but the movements that can be made can cause aches/pain.

Many people who have Tourette's/tics also have a mood disorder such as ADHD, OCD, Depression and/or anxiety which can all make tics worse. It's also worth noting that tiredness and periods of stress/anxiety can also make tics worse.

It is sometimes possible to control tics for short periods of time – such as in certain situations like school, but this is a very difficult thing to achieve, and it takes severe amounts of concentration – which usually means that they are no longer concentrating at the task in hand – eg school. Not only that, but they are exhausting and can lead to a person having a sudden and severe release of tics once they are in a 'safe space.'

Tics also have a tendency to be more discreet and less noticeable when a person is doing something that requires a high level of concentration – such as classwork, playing a sport, reading something they are interested in or otherwise engaged with something else.