



## PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

### Tourette's Disorder

#### Topic Overview

#### What is Tourette's disorder?

Tourette's disorder is a neurological (brain) condition that usually begins in childhood. It causes a child to make sounds or words (vocal tics) and body movements (motor tics) that are beyond his or her control. Tourette's disorder (TD) is also known as Tourette's syndrome and Gilles de la Tourette syndrome. Not all tics are from TD. Your child may have tics and not develop TD.

Motor tics usually begin between ages 2 and 8. Vocal tics can begin as early as age 2, but they usually start a few years after motor tics. Tics generally are at their worst about age 12. In most children, tics go away or decrease quite a bit in the teen years. But tics can continue into adulthood.

The effect tics have on children varies. Some children have mild tics that have a small impact on their lives. But even mild or infrequent tics may affect your child's self-esteem and relationships with friends and family. Severe and frequent tics may require treatment, including medicine and counseling. Although a child's tics may seem minor, they may interfere with the child's ability to learn and can cause embarrassment.

It is important to remember that:

- Tics are not a sign of low intelligence and do not affect intelligence.
- The severity of your child's tics is not a good indicator of how well he or she will perform in school or in social situations.
- How well your child can cope with tics can be helped by a supportive home, school, and community environment.

#### What causes Tourette's disorder?

TD is thought to have a genetic component. This means that having a certain [gene](#) or mix of genes makes a person likely to develop the condition. The exact gene or genes have not been identified. After answering a doctor's detailed questions about the family's medical history, many parents of a child with TD are surprised to learn that other family members may have also had symptoms of the condition.

Other things that may increase a person's risk for developing tics or TD include having:

- A mother who suffered from severe nausea and vomiting during the first trimester of pregnancy, was under severe stress during her pregnancy, or drank a lot of coffee, smoked cigarettes, or drank alcohol during her pregnancy.

- Insufficient oxygen or blood supply during birth.
- A low birth weight and signs of brain injury or an enlarged section of the brain.
- A lower birth weight than an identical twin.
- Abnormal evaluation results right after birth (low [Apgar scores](#)).
- [PANDAS](#). Pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections (PANDAS) can affect tic development. It may make tics worse in children with tics, and it may also cause children who have not had tics to suddenly develop them. More research is needed to study this process.

## What are the symptoms?

Most children with TD have unique types and patterns of vocal and motor tics. These tics may:

- Be a slight twitching of the eyes, jerking of the neck, coughing or throat-clearing, or a series of movements and sounds.
- Occur in bursts of movement (motor) or sounds (vocal). The burst may last from several seconds to several minutes. Tics may also occur more slowly.
- Come and go (wax and wane) over a period of weeks and months and may also change from one type to another. Your child's tics may get more severe and occur more often, and then gradually get better. Weeks or months later, your child may develop a new tic, or an old tic may come back for a while. If your child's symptoms seem to get worse at times, do not assume that you (or your child's school) are doing something wrong. Although things that happen at home and school can have an effect, sometimes tics get worse even when all is going well.

A common stereotype of people with TD is that they all have uncontrollable outbursts of cursing or obscene or sexual behavior. These types of complex tics are not required for a diagnosis of TD. Even though these types of tics may seem routine for TD from what you see on TV and in movies, most children and teens with TD do not have these symptoms.

## How is Tourette's disorder diagnosed?

A doctor can diagnose Tourette's disorder based on your child's medical history and the kinds of symptoms you and other caregivers have noticed. Children may suppress, or hold back, their tics while they're in the doctor's office, so it may help to bring a videotape that shows your child's tics. But a doctor may diagnose TD even though he or she has not seen a video or personally observed any tics.

Your doctor will want to know whether tics are causing school or social problems for your child. Your child may also need psychological testing and testing for learning problems.

As with many other conditions, there are no brain tests or blood tests that can prove a person has TD. But in some cases an [electroencephalogram \(EEG\)](#), a [CT scan](#), or blood tests are done to check for other conditions.

Your child may also be evaluated for [ADHD](#) and [OCD](#). These conditions may occur along with Tourette's disorder. Also, your doctor may ask whether you have noticed signs of other problems for which your child is at increased risk, such as [depression](#) or [anxiety disorders](#).

## How is it treated?

Treatment for Tourette's disorder focuses on managing tics—helping your child and others cope with the tics. Most cases of TD are mild and will not require medical treatment. Educating yourself, your child, and those around your child (such as teachers) about TD will help your child thrive, as will creating a

supportive home and school environment where tics are accepted and accommodated.

In some cases, such as when other conditions are present, counseling may be helpful. If your child's tics affect his or her life significantly, medicines or habit reversal may be considered. The tics can be decreased, but there is no cure for TD at this time.

## Frequently asked questions

### Learning about Tourette's disorder:

- [What is Tourette's disorder?](#)
- [Are there other tic disorders?](#)
- [What are the symptoms of Tourette's disorder?](#)
- [Who is affected?](#)

### Being diagnosed:

- [How is Tourette's disorder diagnosed?](#)

### Getting treatment:

- [How is it treated?](#)

### Living with Tourette's disorder:

- [What can I do at home to help manage Tourette's disorder?](#)

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