

Tourette's Syndrome

What is Tourette's syndrome?

Tourette's syndrome is a neurological condition characterised by a combination of involuntary and repeated movements and sounds, referred to as tics. It usually starts during childhood, and for over half of those affected symptoms will continue into adulthood. A large proportion of people with Tourette's syndrome will also have other co-occurring conditions, the most common being attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

What are tics and how do they affect people?

As noted above, tics are involuntary and repeated movements and sounds. There are four main categories of tics:

	Motor Tics	Vocal Tics
Simple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye blinking • Head jerking • Shoulder shrugging • Nose twitching • Teeth grinding • Eye rolling • Facial grimacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throat clearing • Yelping • Grunting • Squeaking • Sniffing • Coughing • Whistling • Tongue clicking
Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumping • Touching other people or things • Copying other people • Twirling • Hitting or biting oneself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uttering words or phrases out of context • Swearing loudly or shouting inappropriate words and phrases • Repeating a sound, word or phrase

Most people diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome have a combination of all types of tics. Their tics may change over time and can also vary depending on how they are feeling; their tics may be worse when they are stressed, anxious, ill or excited, and may be less severe or frequent when they are relaxed or enjoying or concentrating on a task.

Tics are involuntary, meaning that they are not deliberate - people cannot help letting them out. Most people can suppress their tics for a short time, but this can be very draining. Eventually, the tics will come out and are likely to be even stronger or come in a big 'release'. Most people with Tourette's experience premonitory sensations - uncomfortable or unusual feelings before having a tic.

While tics are unlikely to cause long-term physical health issues, people can experience pain from sudden movements and be affected by disturbed sleep. Many people with Tourette's will also experience social and emotional effects, such as bullying and isolation and low self-esteem.



Helpful tips for supporting someone with Tourette's syndrome at work

Whether you have an employee, colleague or customer with Tourette's, there are some simple things you can do to make their life easier and support them at work:

- Find out if they have any specific triggers, such as foods, chemicals, noise or light, and help them to avoid these triggers at work
- Help them to find ways to manage stress levels, for example, by supporting them with planning their work, staying organised and breaking down tasks into smaller steps
- Talk through any potential changes at work that may affect them and provide support and reassurance
- Encourage them to talk about what is worrying them either with a friend, family member, manager or a workplace buddy
- Suggest relaxation and deep breathing techniques
- Allow them to take regular breaks from tasks so they can get up and walk around
- Encourage them to take regular exercise to help them release excess energy
- Allocate them a quiet space to work, free from distractions and noise
- Discuss if, when and how they want to tell others about their condition
- Ask them about the best way for others to respond to a tic.

Remember, the individual is the expert in their condition – if in doubt, check with them!