



TIPS

for Living With Tourette Syndrome

Tourette syndrome is a neurologic disorder characterized by repetitive, stereotyped, involuntary movements and vocalizations called tics. Tics can be simple or complex. Simple motor tics involve one muscle group (eg, an eye blink, a head jerk, or a shoulder shrug). Complex motor tics use more muscle groups (eg, a person may touch someone, sniff, jump, or make an obscene gesture). The following tips can help if you have Tourette disorder.

Know when to seek treatment. Many people with Tourette disorder have tics that do not interfere with their daily life and therefore do not need treatment. When tics become problematic or impair your life, behavior therapy and medication may be considered.

Understand your medication options. If a single dystonic tic predominates, especially in the larynx, face, or neck, botulinum toxin injection can be a first treatment. Neuroleptics are the most consistently useful medications for tic suppression.

Focus your attention. When your mind is focused, your tics will lessen, and you will not sense it if you do have a tic. Always carry a book of hard crosswords or number puzzles, a handheld computer game, needlework, a sketchbook, or something similarly engrossing, and let yourself get absorbed by it.

Prepare yourself. Think about your tics and about how you can minimize your own discomfort and mitigate other people's potential reactions. For example, if you have complex tics that slow you down when you attend events, allow yourself extra time to get into and out of events.

Find an outlet. Search for places to go where your tics will be unobserved or inconspicuous (eg, loud concerts). Other activities that you may want to explore include swimming, running, skiing, swing dancing, and bicycling, because they provide outlets for your energy.

Wear or carry identification. If your tics are severe, carry an "I have Tourette" card in your wallet. These cards are available online. You also might prefer a Medic-Alert style bracelet or pendant for more difficult situations.

Avoid isolating yourself. It may be tempting to isolate yourself because of your tics, especially if you get curious looks and snide comments. Whether you are at the local library, the shopping mall, or standing on the sidewalk, remember that you have as much right to enjoy public spaces and places as anyone else.

Learn to reverse your tic. Habit reversal is one of the most studied behavioral interventions for people with tics. There are two main parts to this technique, awareness training and competing-response training. With awareness training, people identify each tic out loud. With competing-response training, people learn to perform a new behavior that cannot happen at the same time as the tic.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.