



## Understanding Tics and the Effects of Tics

### **Tics are completely involuntary**

People have no control over their tics. They don't choose what type of tics to have and when to have them. Tics wax and wane—meaning they come and go. Some tics can be persistent and last for a long time, some will be fleeting and last only a short time, and some may happen once and then never again. Some people can suppress tics for short periods of time which take a huge amount of effort, is exhausting and generally painful. Sometimes a tic can be modified but, again, that comes with the expense of effort and discomfort. Please remember that tics are not premeditated, considered, or thought through, and are not directed in a personal way to the people around them, nor are they any reflection of what that person's inner thoughts and feelings.

### **Tics can be situational or contextual**

Some of the more challenging types of tics to deal with are suggestive, environmental or contextual tics which include things like shouting "Bomb!" in an airport, making pig noises when you see police officers or pushing the emergency button/fire alarms

Quite often linked to the types of tics above can be coprolalia which could be shouting a racial insult when you see someone with a different skin colour. It might also be something homophobic, sexual or regarding disability. These offensive tics are evidenced and it is suggested that approximately 10% of the Tourette's population have these types of tics. Some also have copropraxia which includes offensive hand gestures, invading people's space, inappropriate touching of self and others, spitting and hugging or kissing others.

### **The effects of tics**

#### **Pain/Discomfort/Fatigue**

Sometimes tics cause pain, discomfort and fatigue. For example, if you have a motor tic that causes pain, such as constantly scrunching your toes, then you get soft tissue damage, swelling and inflammation. This can cause walking difficulties. If you were doing this through habit or choice then you could stop this movement and let your body heal but because it's a tic, it continues, often with an escalation of pain and fatigue.

#### **Self-Harm**

Some tics cause self-harm, for example, picking at skin and scabs, hitting yourself, putting item into the ears or nose, rubbing the eyes or even trichotillomania (pulling out hair and/or eyelashes).

#### **Exhaustion**

Tics are exhausting whether they are motor, vocal or internal. They may cause sleep disruption or could stop sleep altogether. The physicality of tics takes its toll and is exhausting, but when you add in trying to do everyday activities as well, it's often overwhelming.

#### **Memory/Attention/Concentration**

Tics can affect memory as it's very difficult to concentrate and follow instructions when you are ticking. As tics can interfere with quality of sleep, it can also affect the way you process and store memories.

## **Embarrassment**

Tics can be embarrassing. How would you feel making comment on someone's appearance, invading personal space or touching someone inappropriately? This massively increases anxiety and social anxiety. Sometimes in extreme cases, people become socially isolated or reduce their opportunities to leave their house or safe place.

## **Self-esteem and Confidence**

Tics seriously affect self-esteem and confidence, which in turn affects health and wellbeing.

## **Rage attacks/Meltdowns**

Given all the challenges people who have Tourette Syndrome cope with it is not unexpected that they sometimes can have rage attacks or meltdowns. These are extreme bouts of rage where they are completely out of control and you need to leave them to burn out in a safe environment. Almost always, people are completely remorseful, vulnerable, emotional and exhausted after a rage attack/meltdown.

### **Tic attacks**

Tic attacks can happen when someone is completely overwhelmed. This can be physically, emotionally and/or when they are in sensory overload. It can look like the person is having a seizure; however they tend to remain conscious but are unable to move and speak. It can be very frightening for everyone involved and the more you panic the longer the tic attack is likely to last. If you know someone has tic attacks, then make sure you know how they would like you to support them during these times.

Tic attacks can also be vocal and they tend to look like explosive, prolonged, verbal tics and breathing tics. These can last very long periods of time and are equally as exhausting and stressful as motor tic attacks.