



NHS

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust: Information for young people and families

Tourette syndrome and managing your own tics

Tics are difficult to understand. They change from week to week, and sometimes they disappear completely. However, when you have them, you might like to try out a few ideas to change them, stop them or make them less noticeable to other people. One way of controlling your tics is to take medicine. There is more information about these options in our other information sheets. This information sheet contains lots of ideas for other ways of helping yourself to deal with your tics.

Educate people

A lot of people do not understand TS and tics, but you are the ideal person to educate them. You could make a card or get a sentence ready to deal with any questions. Some people will be rude about your tics, just ignore them and do not worry about explaining your tics to them. The main thing to remember is not to take their comments personally. You are not able to control your tics and they are making comments out of ignorance. Remember, you are the expert and they could benefit from your knowledge.

Don't worry

Try not to worry about your tics and let them influence where you go or how you get there. You might think 'I don't think I'll go because people will notice my tics'. This may make sense in some specific places such as the theatre, but in general, you should be able to go where you like. Remember, just because you have tics doesn't mean you should miss out on life.

Relaxation

For some people with TS, relaxation can make their tics increase, and for others it seems to help them decrease. You will only know which way round it is for you if you try it. Relaxation means different things to different people. For some, it may be listening to some music but for others it might be lying on their bed. As stress has often been reported to increase tics, relaxing might decrease stress, which in turn, has a positive effect on tics.

Focus

Many people find that when they are concentrating on a particular task, their tics reduce or stop completely. Think about what you could do that will capture your attention. It is best to think about things that are cheap and easy to carry around with you. For instance, fiddling with some Blu-tak® or playing with a rubber band. Some people find that playing their hand-held computer game, listening to music or doing puzzles helps. Work out what helps you.

Thinking about your triggers

Some tics only happen in certain places, and seem to be triggered by specific things to do with that situation. For instance, some people find they only have a sniffing tic at the dinner table. It may be helpful to try to think that this is helping the tic to start and try to change it. Thinking certain thoughts might also increase the possibility of a tic starting, so it can be useful to work out which thoughts act as a trigger.

Learning about TS

For a long time, people did not know about TS, and did not understand about tics or the other difficulties that are common with young people with TS. However, we now know more about TS and as a result, it is easier to describe it to other people. There are many good books on TS and organisations such as the Tourette Action have regular meetings, a website and a telephone line you can

call to find out more information. Learning about your TS and sharing the information with teachers, other family members and friends can help to develop their understanding.

Planning is everything

Think about how you can plan for your tics. For instance, if you have a spitting tic, you could chew some gum or bring tissues with you. If you have a throat-clearing tic, you could suck on a sweet or use some vapour rub. If you have a complex tic that means it takes longer to do things, let people know you might be late and why. Warning people in advance is really helpful, especially in school where teachers have to think about all their students and may forget why you sometimes take longer to do things.

Getting active

Many people find that being physically active can wear out the tics for a while. Running around the block, jumping on a trampoline or peddling on an exercise bike might help. Noisy places or places where other people are energetic can help too. Investigate concerts, swimming clubs or drumming clubs in your area. Think of other activities that fit in with what you like to do.

School

Controlling your tics at school can feel hard sometimes. Discuss or ask your parents to discuss with your teacher if you are allowed to take a break outside the classroom if your tics happen a lot or are very noticeable. If they are very bad, getting out of class will let you release your tics so that you are ready to concentrate again but try to limit this as you need to be in the classroom to learn as much as possible. Sitting at one side of the classroom can make your tics less noticeable to your classmates. Discuss this with your class teacher to see if this is possible. You could also ask about doing your exams in a separate room so you can

tic in peace and help you to concentrate better without worrying about disturbing your school friends.

Dealing with quiet places

If you are thinking of going somewhere quiet, you might like to contact the venue beforehand. For example, some cinemas have special showings for people who like to talk or where noisy children are welcome. Trains have quiet carriages as well as normal carriages. Contacting the venue in advance might mean you can have a private area to yourself. If you don't ask them, you might never know.

If your tics are so bad that you feel that you cannot manage them on your own, then we suggest you speak with a healthcare professional about psychological and medical treatments – these are described in other information sheets in this pack.

So in short...

- Explain about your tics if you feel confident
- Don't let your tics stop you doing some things
- Focus your concentration
- Plan for going out and about
- Relaxation may help reduce your tics
- Noisy and energetic places can help too
- Talk to your teacher about school and your tics
- Plan for going to quiet places

