

Understanding Tic Disorders in Children and Teens



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Tic disorders are neurological conditions characterized by sudden, repetitive, nonrhythmic movements or sounds that can be difficult to control. Tics range from mild to severe and, in some cases, may significantly impact a child's daily life. This handout aims to provide information on recognizing, understanding, and supporting children and teens with tic disorders.

Types of Tic Disorders:

1. Transient Tic Disorder: Tics last for less than a year.
2. Chronic Tic Disorder: Tics persist for over a year.
3. Tourette Syndrome: Multiple motor tics and at least one vocal tic present for over a year.

Recognizing Tics:

- Motor Tics: Sudden, repetitive movements (eye blinking, facial grimacing, head jerking, etc.).
- Vocal Tics: Sudden, repetitive sounds or words (throat clearing, sniffing, grunting, shouting words involuntarily).

Causes of Tic Disorders:

The exact cause of tic disorders is not fully understood. Factors that may contribute include:

- Genetics: Tics often run in families.
- Neurological Factors: Differences in brain structure or neurotransmitters.
- Environmental Factors: Stress, certain medications, or infections might trigger or worsen tics.

Supporting Children and Teens with Tic Disorders:

1. Educate and Understand Tics: Educate yourself and others about tic disorders to reduce stigma and misunderstanding.
2. Create a Supportive Environment: Create an accepting and understanding environment at home and school.
3. Avoid Stress: Minimize stressors and provide opportunities for relaxation.
4. Encourage a Healthy Lifestyle: Adequate sleep, regular exercise, and a balanced diet can help manage tics.
5. Limit Screen Time: Excessive screen time might exacerbate tics in some individuals.
6. Consider Medication and/or Therapy: Consult a healthcare professional for possible medications or therapies if tics significantly impact daily life.

How to Support a Child or Teen with Tics:

- Be Patient and Understanding: Tics are involuntary and can worsen with stress.
- Avoid Drawing Attention: Drawing attention to tics can increase anxiety and exacerbate symptoms.
- Encourage Self-Acceptance: Help the child or teen accept themselves for who they are, including the tics.
- Foster Open Communication: Encourage open discussions about tics and feelings related to them.
- Advocate for Support: Work with healthcare providers and educators to ensure appropriate accommodations and support.