

# TICS AND TOURETTE SYNDROME

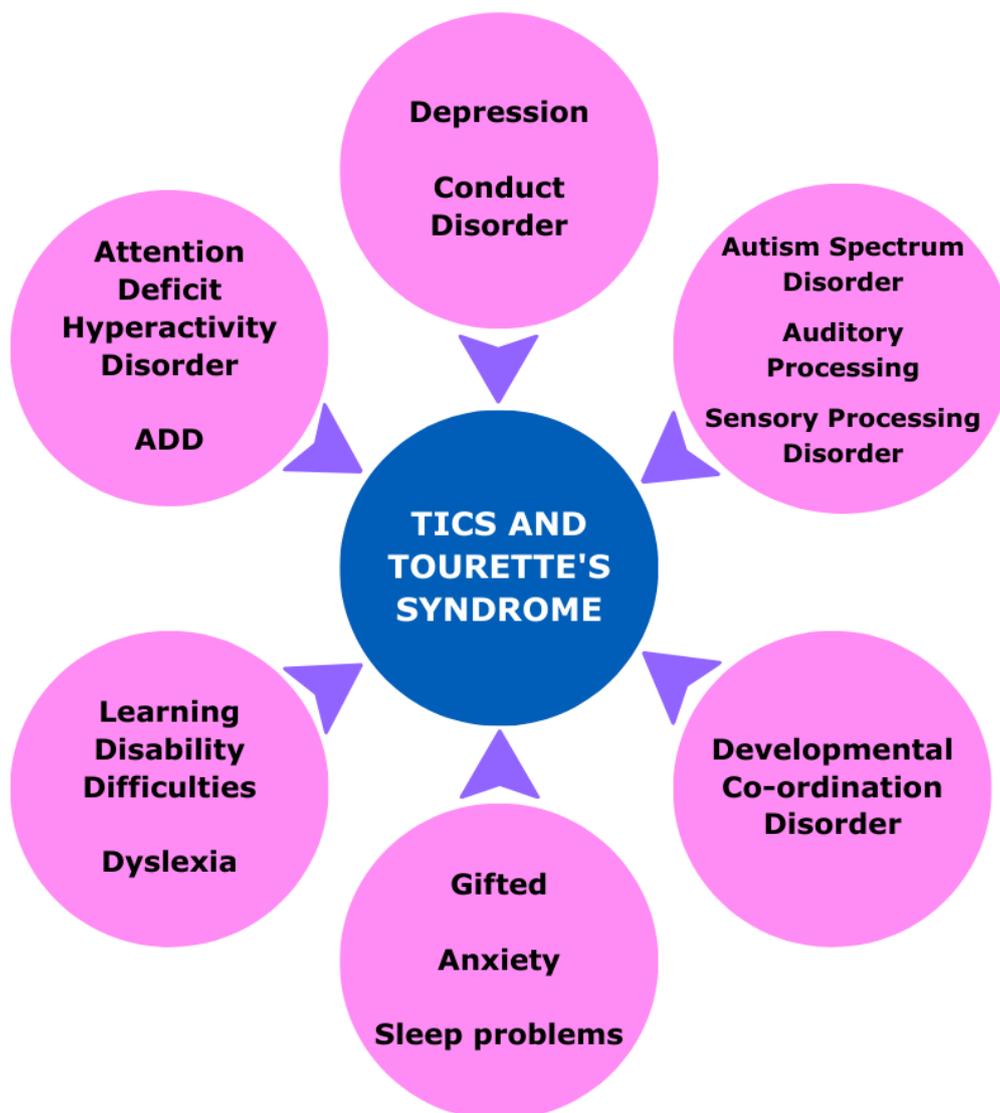
## What are tics and Tourette syndrome?

There are two types of tics.

Motor tics include repeated body movements such as abnormal eye-blinking, facial twitching and shrugging of the shoulders etc. Vocal tics are repeated sounds, for example coughing, throat clearing or grunting. Some people may experience a strange sensation (premonitory urge) such as feeling tense prior to having a tic. Tics come and go and are often brought on by stress or anxiety. Managing any underlying anxiety can be very helpful.

Tourette syndrome is a relatively rare condition, affecting about a 1% of the population. It is diagnosed as a combination of motor and vocal tics occurring for more than a year. In many people, the tics are mild and do not need treatment. Medication can be tried in the case of severe tics. Other treatments include psychotherapy and behaviour therapy, (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, such as habit reversal training).

Please visit the website of [Tourettes Action](https://www.tourettesaction.org/) for more information.



## Some common tics include:

- Motor tics (movements)
- Shoulder shrugging
- Eye blinking
- Lip biting
- Facial grimacing
- Vocal tics (sounds)
- Clearing the throat
- Humming, sniffing, snorting or squealing
- Repeating words

## What causes tics?

While we don't fully know what causes tics, there is evidence to suggest that tics are hereditary. This means if a parent experiences tics, a child is more likely to have one as well. They can also be environmental. Environmental triggers include poor sleep, sickness and stress.

## There are three kinds of tic disorders:

**Provisional tic disorder:** Formerly called "transient tic disorder," this is the diagnosis most children will receive if they have a simple motor or vocal tic that's lasted less than a year. It is not yet clear if the tics will evolve into a more serious tic disorder or resolve without assistance. Children with provisional tic disorder often stop having tics on their own.

**Chronic motor or vocal tic disorder:** To be diagnosed with a chronic tic disorder, a child's tics must be persistent for over a year without going away for any prolonged period time. Children who have a chronic tic disorder usually need clinical intervention to help them manage it.

**Tourette's syndrome (also known as Tourette's disorder):** Tourette's is probably the best known tic disorder, thanks to wide portrayal in the media, but it is not the most common. For a diagnosis of Tourette's syndrome, a child must exhibit multiple motor tics and at least one vocal tic for more than a year and be under the age of 18. A very small percentage of children have what's called coprolalia, which involves involuntary cursing or making socially inappropriate remarks. "Most people with Tourette's syndrome also have other symptoms as well." This could be disorders such as OCD, an anxiety disorder, ADHD or autism spectrum disorder.

A paediatrician will determine if more help is needed and offer a referral to a neurologist or a psychiatrist. These doctors will want to rule out other possible issues that could be causing the tics, including:

- A seizure disorder
- A condition called PANS or PANDAS that causes acute-onset obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Other neurological or movement disorders and the initial realisation that a child has a tic can be disturbing. "Parents are often more distressed by a child's tics than the child

is. If a child has a mild tic that isn't bothering him, we usually encourage parents to wait and see if it resolves on its own."

## Treatment

Parents should seek treatment if:

- Tics have been present for over a year, or are becoming more severe
- Tics are causing social problems or have become upsetting to your child

The treatment of choice for tic disorders is a form of cognitive behavioural therapy called habit reversal therapy (HRT).

The goal of HRT is to help children develop a kind of early warning defence system to help them counteract the tics before they occur.

As part of HRT children may also be taught relaxation techniques like breathing or mindfulness exercises that can help decrease the frequency of their tics.

Medication options for tics and tic disorders vary widely, and depend on the severity of the tics and other disorders a child may have.