

What Everyone Should Know About Tourette Syndrome

Q. WHAT IS TOURETTE SYNDROME?

A. Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder of the brain, which causes involuntary movements and vocalizations known as *tics*.

Q. WHAT IS A TIC?

A. There are two main categories of tics: motor tics and vocal tics. *Motor tics* are sudden repetitive movements of the muscles of the body that occur repeatedly. *Vocal tics* are in the muscles that control speech and cause involuntary sounds that may be loud at times. Tics may include eye blinking; neck, arm, or leg jerking; sniffing; throat clearing; barking noises; and in some cases saying bad words (this only happens in about 10 percent of the people with TS). Tics will come and go based on stress, anxiety, excitement, and fatigue.

Q. HOW IS TS DIAGNOSED?

A. The criterion for diagnosis is the presence of at least two motor tics and one vocal tic. No two cases look the same. Tics can increase and decrease over time and new tics can emerge with no warning. Most symptoms begin at about age seven. TS is seen more frequently in boys than girls.

Q. WHAT CAUSES THE SYMPTOMS?

A. The cause has not been established, although current research presents considerable evidence that the disorder stems from the abnormal activity of at least one brain chemical (neurotransmitter) called *dopamine*. There may be abnormal activity of the receptor for this chemical as well. Undoubtedly, other neurotransmitters, e.g., serotonin, may be involved.

Q. WHAT ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS ARE THERE IN ADDITION TO TICS?

A. Obsessions and compulsions and ritualistic behaviors (OCD), attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADD or ADHD), learning disabilities, difficulties with impulse control, and sleep disorders

Q. IS TS INHERITED?

A. Genetic studies indicate that TS is inherited as a dominant gene (or genes) causing different symptoms in different family members.

Q. HOW MANY PEOPLE IN THE USA HAVE TS?

A. Since many people with TS have yet to be diagnosed, there are no absolute figures. The official estimate by the National Institutes of Health is that 100,000 Americans have full-blown TS. It is believed that this number could be as high as 1 million if everyone were diagnosed.

Q. IS THERE ANY TREATMENT FOR TS?

A. There are medications that can be given to help calm down the tics. Those who take medication must be aware of the side effects. The importance of an early diagnosis is crucial in helping children and adults cope with TS.

Q. WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF TS?

A. While there is no cure for TS, the symptoms often become less severe as individuals grow older. TS is **not** a degenerative condition and is **not** life-threatening. TS does **not** impair intelligence. Individuals with TS live normal, healthy lives. People with TS are in every profession and enjoy all kinds of recreational activities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON TS, SEE THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

www.tsa-usa.org

www.tourettes.org

www.lifesatwitch.com

Front of the Class: How Tourette Syndrome Made Me the Teacher I Never Had

by Brad Cohen with Lisa Wysocky, Foreword by Jim Eisenreich

(published by VanderWyk & Burnham, 272 pp, 6x9, ISBN 1-889242-24-1, \$22.95 hardcover)

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