

Motor Tics in Children and Young People

What is a motor tic?

A motor tic is a fast, repetitive series of muscle movements that result in sudden and difficult to control body jolts or sounds. Tics are very common in children from the age of 5 years and it is estimated that 20% of children (1 in 5) experience motor tics at some point. The vast majority of motor tics resolve themselves over time with reassurance for the child without the need for any treatment.

Are tics related to Tourette's?

Vocal tics are when a child shouts or makes a sudden noise. Vocal tics can occur with motor tics. If these continue to occur over a period of time (normally more than a year) a child can be diagnosed with 'Tourette's syndrome'. This term is used when these tics have lasted more than a year. (Please see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tourettes-syndrome/>)

Tics and other conditions

Tics can occur on their own. In some cases, they are also associated with anxiety, stress or panic disorders. They can be more common in children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

What are some of the signs of tics?

- blinking, wrinkling the nose or grimacing
- jerking or banging the head
- clicking the fingers
- touching other people or things
- coughing, grunting or sniffing
- repeating a sound or phrase – in a small number of cases, this may be something obscene or offensive.

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How do they happen?

They often start with an unpleasant sensation that builds up in the body until relieved by the tic – known as an urge – although they can sometimes be partly suppressed.

Tics can happen randomly and they may be triggered by feelings like stress, anxiety, tiredness, excitement or happiness.

What makes tics worse?

- Stress
- Tiredness
- Boredom
- There can be different triggers for each child.

What helps reduce tics?

- Distraction and concentrating on other activities which interest your child
- Exercise
- Better sleep.

How can I help my child?

Here are some suggestions of ways to help manage tics and reduce worry:

- Try to ignore your child's tic and not talk about it too much – drawing attention to it may make it worse
- Reassure your child that everything's OK and there's no reason for them to feel embarrassed
- Ensure that people having regular contact with your child are aware of your child's tics and explain how best they can respond if one occurs
- If your child is finding school difficult, talk to their teacher about ways of dealing with this. For example, it may help if they're allowed to leave the classroom if their tics are particularly bad.

Do Tics need treatment?

Tics are not usually serious and they do not damage the brain. They usually go away on their own. If they are mild and do not cause problems, they might disappear as quickly as they appeared.

Contact your GP for advice if your child's tics

- Occur very regularly, or become more frequent or severe
- Cause emotional or social problems, such as embarrassment, bullying or social isolation
- Cause pain or discomfort (some tics can cause the person to accidentally hurt themselves)
- Interfere with daily life, school and social activities
- Are accompanied by anger, depression or self-harm.

Recording videos of your child's tics could be helpful for health professionals, to see (but please do not cause distress in trying to do this).

What will my child's GP do?

They will ask about your child's medical history, carry out an examination, and ask you about the frequency and symptoms experienced by your child.

Your GP may find it helpful to see a recording of your child when they experience their tic. Please do not record your child if you feel that doing this will cause distress or upset.

Your GP may be able to diagnose and manage simple tics and provide support and advice without involvement of a hospital specialist.

What Support is offered by Specialists?

Behavioural therapies

Behavioural therapy uses a talking treatment to help find coping strategies for dealing with problems. This is often recommended as one of the first treatments for children with tics.

Your GP might be able to refer your child to CAMHS for help with this type of therapy.

Medical treatment

Your GP will refer you to a Paediatrician if they think this may be appropriate. The Paediatrician will ask about the tics and examine your child to exclude any other problems which might be causing these movements.

If they think that your child has tics they will be able to offer advice on how best to manage these.

Very occasionally, children with very troublesome or complex tics can be trialled on a medication called neuroleptics. This needs to be done under specialist hospital supervision and will only be used if other strategies have not helped. Risks and benefits would be discussed with you and your child.

Trusted sources of further information and support

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tics/>

The Tourette's Action - Charity offering advice & support

<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/>

Bullying UK - UK charity offering advice and support for families

<https://www.bullying.co.uk/advice-for-parents/>



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PALS can provide information, advice and support to patients and relatives and will listen to and act on your concerns, suggestions or queries.

020 8934 3993

khft.pals@nhs.net

Accessible information

We are actively working to make our patient information easier to read and accessible in a range of formats.

If you would like this information in large print, audio or electronic format please speak to a member of staff in the department. If you need a different format, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your request

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Please call the hospital switchboard on 020 8546 7711 and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain.

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