

What Exactly are the Tics seen in Tourette's Syndrome??

The essential criterion for individuals with a motor tic disorder, vocal tic disorder, or Tourette's Syndrome are tics. Now, what exactly are tics anyway? By definition, tics are brief, intermittent, repetitive, nonrhythmic, unpredictable, and purposeless. For patients with motor or vocal tics or both, this last criterion is a very difficult one to get over. Tics have no purpose and for most individuals they are embarrassing and they struggle with self-esteem issues as well as social situations. Motor tics involve stereotyped movements and vocal tics involve certain sounds that the individual will make repetitively such as sniffing, clearing of the throat, or coughing. Although, there are a variety of other vocal tics, these seem to be the most common.

Tourette's syndrome seems to begin for individuals for the most part between the ages of five and seven years old and the symptoms peak out at around the age of ten years. During adolescence and by the age of 18 they might seem to diminish. However, for some individuals they might have the tics for their entire life. When this is the case, the motor and/or vocal tics seem to become more severe when they are adults. The prevalence of adult patients that have Tourette's is seen in less than 10% of cases.

Why do the tics begin in the first place? Tics themselves are associated with an urge and the patient's effort to suppress or stop the tic only results in more anxiety and tension. When the patient is able to express this urge whether it is a vocal or a motor tic, then they have relief that they were able to express the tic. Tics are involuntary by nature, however they can be suppressed by the individual for a short period of time, however after this occurs there is usually a period of a lot of tics over a short period of time. For the individual, being able to express themselves through the tic, whether it is vocal or motor releases tension for them. When they try to suppress them for even a short period of time, the tics come back ten-fold.

Tics seem to **worsen** when patients are in stressful situations. When the individual is relaxed though the tics seem to **improve** and when they are sleeping they seem to markedly diminish. Trying to hold back a tic is like telling someone not to sneeze, cough when they are sick with a cold, or not to blink.

Lastly, simple tics are seen often in childhood and seem to vanish over time. These types of tics are usually brought on by extremely stressful situations. However, if after a year the tics seem to persist and go on and on, then this is likely Tourette's Syndrome.

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