



A NEURODEVELOPMENTAL CONDITION

Tics & Tourette Syndrome

Tics are sudden, repetitive movements (motor) or sounds (vocal) that a person feels compelled to make and cannot easily control. Tourette Syndrome is when someone has several motor tics and at least one vocal tic for over a year.

i Tics are common in childhood and often come and go; most are mild. Involuntary swearing (coprolalia) is **rare** – about 1 in 10 – and is **not** needed for a diagnosis, despite being the best-known myth.

i How it can present

- Motor tics – blinking, grimacing, head jerks or shoulder shrugs
- Vocal tics – throat-clearing, sniffing, coughing or sounds
- A premonitory urge (a build-up) felt just before a tic
- Tics wax and wane – they change, fade and are replaced over time
- Often worse with stress, excitement, anxiety or tiredness
- Can be briefly held back, but this is effortful and tiring

✓ What helps – supportive approaches

- ✓ Understanding and acceptance – tics are involuntary; never punish them
- ✓ Reducing stress and anxiety; a calm, predictable environment
- ✓ Not drawing attention to tics in the moment
- ✓ Allowing movement and 'tic breaks' and a safe space
- ✓ Educating peers and staff (with the young person's consent)
- ✓ NHS behavioural therapy (e.g. CBIT / ERP); reasonable adjustments in exams

📍 UK CONTEXT

~1%

About 1 in 100 school-aged children has Tourette Syndrome – over 300,000 children and adults in the UK. Simple tics are even more common.

Tourettes Action

★ Strengths often seen

- ★ Creativity and original thinking
- ★ Resilience and self-awareness
- ★ Humour and a positive outlook
- ★ Determination and perseverance
- ★ Energy and strong focus on interests

📍 Finding assessment & support in the UK

- 1 GP referral to NHS services (community paediatrics, CAMHS or neurology)
- 2 School SENCo / SEN Support to put classroom adjustments in place
- 3 NHS specialist or tic services for assessment and behavioural therapy
- 4 Request an EHC needs assessment / EHCP where needs are greater
- 5 Tourettes Action offers information and a helpdesk

Please note – this sheet provides general information only. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for individual assessment or professional advice. Every person is unique; if you have concerns about yourself or a child, please speak with a suitably qualified professional.

Sources & further information: Tourettes Action · NHS · NICE · Great Ormond Street Hospital