

Tic Tips: Strategies to help you manage your Tourette Syndrome



Aside from medication and behavioral therapy, there are strategies and measures which people with TS can take to help manage their tics. Unfortunately there is no one-size-fits-all solution for managing tics. Everybody has their own ways of coping; what might work for one person may not be suitable for another.

We have provided a list of creative ways to manage tics, based on feedback from people in the TS community.

Please note that these tips cannot substitute for the advice of a qualified medical professional. Tourettes Action cannot take any responsibility for the results or consequences of any attempt to use or adopt any of the information presented.

Motor Tics

Arm/hand tics

- Engage in an activity which requires your concentration, for example making something with your hands.
- Invest in a laptop if you have difficulty with handwriting. Some students may be entitled to borrow one or obtain a grant to get their own.

Banging and tapping

- Try put something softer on the table (eg a mouse mat) to avoid hurting hands and fingers
- Try putting plasters on the fingers or hands
- Try using a 'fiddle toy'
- Try a corn plaster on sore finger tips
- Try strapping fingers together if one gets sore
- Try gloves with foam at the end of the fingers

'Bouncing' on chairs

- Put a pillow on the seat or use a bean bag

Bruxism (teeth grinding)

- Visit dentist to request a fitted tooth guard be made
- Chew gum
- Gum shields can help short term (can be purchased from sports shops)

Eye tics

- Try blinking slowly on purpose

Finger-flicking tics

- Try putting plasters on the fingers BEFORE they get sore.

Full body movements

- Consider warming up in the mornings and after periods of inactivity, as you would before exercise
- Stretch muscles regularly
- Consider using massages and hot baths for aching muscles

Inappropriate grabbing

- Avoid crowded seating arrangements, be that at school, work or in any other public space

Head shaking or neck jerking

- Heat therapy products such as wheat germ pillows and heat pads
- Hot water bottle/hot towel applied to painful area
- Pain-relief gel can help but, as with all medications, read the instructions carefully and check with your doctor if you are using painkillers regularly
- Asking a doctor for a neck brace if a neck tic is particularly bad

- Some children find it helpful to have their head lightly supported by a parent or by lying down

Hitting or kicking

- Allow space for an individual with these tics
- Sometimes a muscle clench can 'get the tension out' instead

Mouth tics

- Ask dentist to fit tooth guard.
- Chew gum.
- Pain relief pge/gel for ulcers.
- Suck ice for ulcers, or ice lollies or frozen bananas.
- Chew on a plastic ring instead of mouth or tongue, or a rubber TA wristband.

Spitting or vomiting

- Keep hanky in corner of mouth.
- Chew gum.
- Carry receptacle in which to spit.
- Put down rugs indoors to avoid damage to carpet, or lay wood floors.

Stabbing with sharp objects

- Avoid using sharp objects. Use blunt pencils, plastic knives and rounded end scissors.

Wetting

(This can happen with certain abdominal tics)

- Plan drinks and visits to bathroom to keep bladder empty. For a schoolchild, this might mean timing a drink to ensure that they have time to empty their bladder before going to class.
- Arrange with school for permission to leave class if necessary.
- Use incontinence pads.

Wrapping hair around fingers

- Try using something thicker (eg wool) to avoid cutting into the skin.



Vocal Tics

For all vocal tics, a tip is to consciously breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose. Sounds are made by air coming out over the larynx so reversing the process calms most vocal tics.

Coprolalia

- Prepare people around you if possible.
- When you feel the impulse to swear coming on, you could begin to say a rhyme or limerick in your head. Some people have said that going through a rhyme enables the impulse for coprolalia to pass.
- Carry information on TS (eg. Tourettes Action ID card).
- Help children with coprolalia to formulate a way of explaining the symptom to others.

Coughing

- Try to support neck during coughing fits.
- Ask GP about simple linctuses to soothe throat.

High pitched scream

- Ignore and wear ear plugs if necessary.
- If working with a child with this tic, rotate teaching staff/carers at fixed time intervals to reduce risk of damage to hearing.

General ideas to reduce tics

Exercise

Activities

Such as playing a musical instrument or singing.

One-on-one time

Have a daily meeting with a member of your family, to talk about your day and anything on your mind.

Get tics and hyperactivity out of your system the fun way

Do something like banging pots and pans, or running round the garden for a couple of minutes, and then sit still for five minutes. Make a game of it.

Use humour

Laughter is a very powerful weapon against feeling down and can help lighten the mood when things are tough.

Find a mentor

If someone is having trouble at school, it can be helpful to choose a particular teacher as a mentor, so that there is someone to talk to when parents aren't around.

Music

Using a portable music player can help to block out sounds, people and other distractions if you are travelling.

Get online

Social networks on the internet can be a good way to connect with people and build up self esteem.

Support networks

Use the Tourettes Action support networks to get in touch with people if you feel isolated.

Get learning

Learn as much as you can about TS and educate your friends, family and colleagues. Provide professionals with as much information as you can (you can get this from Tourettes Action).

A quiet spot

Have a quiet room to tic in peace if you need it.

Teamwork

Work as a team: friends and family of people with TS feel the impact, too.

Professional talk

Get medical and educational professionals to talk to each other.

The three 'C's

Use the 'Three C's' to help with stress and tics: Stay Calm, Be Confident and have Control.

Secret signal

Parents could have a secret signal between them to show when problems are arising.

Keep up to date

Watch television programmes and read books about TS, and keep up to date with research.

Avoid stress

Don't put yourself in situations where you know you will be stressed if you can avoid them.

If you ever want to talk to someone about your tics, then call the Tourettes Action Helpline on 0300 777 8427.