

# Guidance for people with Tourette Syndrome going to university



## So, you've finished school: what next? If you like studying a particular subject, or maybe you just don't feel ready for a job, then why not try university?

Further education isn't for everyone, but universities can be a very valuable experience, on both personal and professional levels. Below is some information that might be useful if you are going to university and have Tourette Syndrome.

Note: much of this information can be applicable to mature students as well.

### Applying for university

Your Sixth Form, College, or other educational establishment should guide you through the process of applying to university. However, if for some reason you need to apply by yourself, you should go to [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) to do your application. This is the website where all university applications are processed. It will give guidance on how to complete the process.

Note: a degree doesn't have to be in an academic subject: you can do practical and/or unconventional subjects, from Metal Work and Jewellery to Community Youth Work. There is a course for almost everything, so there is bound to be something that interests you.

### Going to university

Congratulations on getting in. You are probably quite excited about beginning university. Still, there may be some worries on your mind about how you are going to cope on your course. Here is some advice about how to deal with TS related problems at university.

## Do I tell people at university about my TS?

This is a question that you have, no doubt, asked yourself before, but you don't have to give the same answer. Many people look upon university as a fresh start, a chance to present themselves how they want to be: after all, it is likely that no one else there knows you. So, it is up to you whether you want to tell people or not.

Also, universities tend to be a bit different in their structure: they allow you much more freedom to do what you want. There will also probably be a bigger mixture of types of people: it won't be like at school, where everyone was from the same town or city. You could say that individuality is more appreciated at university: It isn't a blanket rule by any means, and it depends on the university, but it may be the case that people will be more accepting of TS.

There are different people to consider when thinking about telling people at uni:

### Tutors and supervisors

It is a good idea to let your tutors and supervisors know about your TS. If they know, they can make the arrangements for you so that you can have the support you need to complete your degree, or anything else you might need.

### Housemates

It might be a good idea to tell your housemates too. These are people that you are going to have to share the same space, kitchen and probably bathrooms with for the best part of a year, so it might be nice to have an open policy about your TS. This way, if you have a vocal tic at midnight whilst someone is trying to sleep, they can be understanding about it. You might even all be able to laugh about it!

Essentially, living with other people is a compromise, and being open about TS might help you have a more relaxing environment at home. But if you don't want to tell the housemates, that's fine too. It's a personal choice.

Some universities, though not all, let you know early, before term starts who your flatmates will be, in order so that you can communicate over a forum to get to know each other. If your university provides it, you might want to use this facility to get to know people, or even tell them about your TS: it is often much easier to tell people things over the internet, when you aren't face to face.

### **Course mates and friends**

Again, you don't have to tell people in your lectures or seminars. Still, it might help to let people know about your TS, so that if you have a vocal tic during a lecture or seminar for example, they can understand that it's not intentional. For example, think of when someone has a cough or keeps sneezing: the person is making a noise that they can't help, and it is the same sort of thing with TS. People will tend to be only temporarily distracted by noises anyway. Maybe, if you aren't comfortable initially, you can tell them a few lessons into the course. It might also help you to concentrate better if you don't have to focus on suppressing tics. Again though, it's a personal choice, and you should do what you think is best.

### **What if I need particular accommodation?**

It might be that the symptoms of your TS require you to have a certain type of accommodation, for whatever reason. E.g., loud noises cause your tics to worsen, so living away from a campus venue could help. If this is the case, then you should mention it on your application form when you apply for accommodation. If you have a problem with the process and you don't get the accommodation you want, it is worth talking to the university's Student Union, who can help you.

### **What if I cause damage to my accommodation because of my TS?**

#### **Campus accommodation**

You might be a bit worried that a symptom of your TS will cause you to damage parts of the property or furniture you are living in while at university. University accommodation rules usually have a clause saying that you are liable for a fine if the room is damaged. However, the university should be understanding about this, provided of course that you have disclosed your TS, and it might be that you can come to an agreement. Also, if

you do damage the property or furniture because of TS, then you should talk to your supervisor, accommodation officer, or whoever you have been told to report these issues to immediately after the damage has occurred. Otherwise, it might be difficult to prove that the damage happened because of a TS symptom.

#### **Landlords**

Regarding landlords, the area is less clear-cut because the letting agreement you have to sign is drawn up by the landlord, and generally, all damage other than normal wear and tear is the responsibility of the tenant. Before you sign a contract, it is recommended that you make your landlord aware of your TS; otherwise you might lose your bond deposit.

Depending on the landlord, you might be able to ask the contract to include a clause excluding you for all liability for damage incurred due to TS. Also, it is likely that your university will have a resource where you can get basic advice before you sign a contract, and they may be able to help you with this issue. Be aware also that tenancy is covered under the Equality Act, and a landlord cannot refuse to let accommodation to you because of your Tourette's. For Northern Ireland, please check with [Equality NI](#), as the NI version differs slightly.

### **What if my tics disturb my neighbours?**

You might feel that your tics will cause problems with neighbours. It is very polite of you to be considerate, though you needn't worry about this too much: most students have to put up with noise from their housemates, so people will be expecting it and used to it. Chances are you will encounter far noisier people. But if you still feel a bit self-conscious, then it might be possible to request to your university to place you in older accommodation: older buildings tend to have thicker walls than modern halls, which might help insulate noise. If the university is a new one or is unable to provide older accommodation, it might be worth requesting that the university soundproofs your room to some extent. Remember, the Equality Act also covers universities, so it might be that soundproofing comes under 'reasonable adjustments' by the Equality Act, although you will have to take this up with your university.

### What if I tic in lectures and seminars?

Ticcing in lectures and seminars can be an issue for both you and your fellow students. For you, it might be difficult to have to tic and write down what the lecturer is saying at the same time, or difficult to concentrate when you are suppressing tics. There are a few ways to get around this: perhaps you could talk to the lecturer and let them know, so that they can provide you with printed copies of notes, rather than having to write them down. Alternatively, you could get a friend or another student from your course to help you take notes. You should be allowed to take your laptop into a lecture as well, so you could type notes instead of using pen and paper, if you find it easier. Also, a dictaphone might prove useful, as you can record the whole lecture or seminar, and go back to it later.

It might be an idea to speak to your lecturer, in order to let them know that you will be making noises during the lecture. This way, you are being very polite, and also, will stop the lecturer drawing attention to you if they stop the lecture and ask you why you are interrupting.

If you are feeling a bit worried about ticcing in lectures and seminars though, you should talk it over with your university's welfare officer, and/ or their disability officer. Remember: you have a right equal to all others to attend lectures and seminars, and to get what you are paying for.

### What if I have trouble doing the work and taking exams?

You might have found taking exams difficult because of your tics. If this is the case, then university examinations should accommodate you with a private room and/or extra time. To make sure you get enough time, remember to notify your tutor and/or supervisor well in advance: months, not weeks or days.

When it comes to university work, like essays, reports etc, the best thing to do is ask your supervisor for help from the beginning. It might be handy to have a meeting every few weeks, or when you have deadlines looming, to make sure you are keeping up with the work and are getting the best out of your degree. You can ask friends, and welfare officers to help you with this as well. If you have fallen behind, still seek help, you might still be able to rectify things. Also, bear in mind that there are re-sits for a number of exams, although this doesn't usually apply to the final year of study.

### What if I need to see a doctor if I am away at university?

When you are away at university, you should register with the local GP: your files will be transferred, and the doctor should have your medical history available. You should do this as soon as possible, during Fresh-er's week. Also, if you need to see a specialist, contact Tourettes Action, and we can refer you to the specialist nearest to your area.

If you are taking medication, you should also inform your supervisor or tutor.

### People who can help

#### UCAS

Manages application to higher education courses in the UK as well as providing information and advice for students and parents on university related topics  
[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

#### Direct Gov

The government website has lots of advice about most aspects of going to university. [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

#### NUS

The National Union of Students has good advice about university matters. [www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk)

#### Skill

The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities help find prospects for any students 16+ with a disability  
[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

#### Student's Union

Any university will usually have a Student's Union, who can provide you with advice and information, and have the authority to take up issues with the university should you have a problem.

#### Disability Services and Welfare Officers

The majority of universities have Disability Services and/ or a Welfare department, (though the title of the service may vary according to the university), which can help ease any trouble.

#### Counselling Service

Lots of universities have free counsellors on hand to talk about any issues that you might have, even if you are just feeling stressed.

Sources: GOV UK, Skill, Connexions, NUS.