

Guidance on employment for people with Tourette Syndrome



Having Tourette Syndrome does not necessarily prevent you from fulfilling your career aspirations. Many people with TS have successful careers, and are able to sustain employment. However, for some people with TS, employment may be an issue as symptoms can make it difficult to work regular hours or in your preferred field. Sometimes it is necessary for an employer to know if their employee has TS, so that practical solutions can be created in the workplace to support the employee.

We have put some information together that looks at:

Steps to employment

Choosing careers, job finding, interviews

Disclosing your condition to your employer

When is it appropriate to tell your employer you have TS, telling your colleagues

Managing stress at work

Self help tools to help manage stress

Responsibility of the employer

Employer's duty to disabled workers, reasonable adjustments

Discrimination in the workplace

What to do if you feel you have been discriminated against at work, bullying

Other types of employment options for people with TS

Social firms, self-employment

Useful organisations and resources

Steps to employment

Career choice

Choosing a career may be something you do straight out of school or university; it may be the result of taking stock of what you are doing in your 40s and deciding that you don't like it; or be caused by redundancy. Whatever the cause, it can involve thinking about a wholly new career path. Careers guidance can be helpful. This involves asking questions like: What do you like? What can you do? What sort of environment is best for you?

Job finding

Finding a new job is not always easy, especially in current economic conditions. However, your local job centre should be able to provide details of many organisations which can help with CV writing and interview skills.

Interviews

Interviews can be stressful for people. The anxiety that interviews can cause can aggravate tics and make you even more stressed. However, they are an opportunity to show a prospective employer how good you are, and to find out if this is an organisation that you want to work for.

Remember: if you have got as far as the interview, the employer thinks you can do the job. Your task now is to show that you will do it better than the other candidates.

Some people feel more comfortable keeping their TS to themselves at interview. If you do say that you have TS, present it as positively as you can. It may well be that TS is a help rather than a hindrance to getting a job. For example, if you want to work for a charity or as a teaching assistant, your first-hand knowledge and insight into TS, and living with a disability, will be a great asset.

In preparation for your interview, think of some examples of how your TS is a positive attribute in relation to the role you are applying for, Think about whether or not you will be suppressing tics and what affect that will have on you. For example, will it be harder to concentrate if you are suppressing? The employer can only ask you questions about your TS if it is likely that having TS is going to affect your ability to do that particular job.

Sometime stress can make tics worse, so try to be as well-prepared as you can. Practising your response to commonly asked interview questions and finding out as much as you can about your prospective employer may help you to feel more confident and, therefore, more relaxed.

If you have disclosed your condition on your application form, or at the start of the interview, you could negotiate with the interviewee a time out if you feel your symptoms become an issue for you. If anything, this demonstrates a high level of responsibility and self-management.

Disclosing your condition to your employer

It is not a legal requirement to tell your employer of your condition. This decision is to be made at your own discretion, and will depend on the severity of your TS and how it impacts your life, and more importantly, your ability to work in a specific role. You can let your employer know about your condition at the following stages

- on an application form or CV
- before or at an interview
- when you have been offered a job
- when you start a job
- later, when you are in work.

If you feel that your TS may impact on their ability to carry out a job, then it would be recommended that they disclose it on the application form. If you feel you might need some extra support to do the job, then the same advice would apply.

Disclosure doesn't have to mean saying what you can't do. Instead, pick out what it is about your disability that makes you better at the job or makes you a better employee. For example, are you more motivated to do the job, or do you really want to prove wrong the people who say you can't do the job? You might argue, if the job involves working with the public, that your own experiences make it easier to empathise with others.

OCD might work in your favour when a job involves attention to detail. Disability can be empowering in many different ways.

Disclosing your condition with colleagues

It may be necessary to raise awareness of your disability with colleagues, for example, to explain why you are being treated differently from them. The disability may not affect how you do the job, but may affect other people's perceptions of you.

Considerations about disclosing your condition

If you don't think your TS would impact on your job and are not specifically asked if you have a health condition, then you may not feel it is necessary to disclose this information to your employer. But this needs thinking through, as it all depends on the context. For example, diabetes does not affect the way someone does their job, so arguably it is not a disability and need not be disclosed. But that person might suffer hypoglycaemic shock and go into a coma. Looking at it from that perspective, disclosure is necessary.

You should not be tempted to lie about a disability. The lie in itself is sufficient reason to dismiss someone. The cause for the dismissal would be the lie, not the disability. However, this can depend on the wording of the question. 'Do you have a disability?' is a very different question from 'Do you consider yourself to have a disability?'

If your employer is unaware that you have TS, but your condition begins to have a bigger effect on you, you can talk to your employer when the time seems right for you. It does not matter that you have not said anything up to this point, as it may not have been necessary for you to do so. You should not be discriminated against for disclosing your condition after securing employment.

This information was taken from the UK government website:

www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person/employment

If your TS does become more challenging and you feel like you're not coping then it might be advisable to take some time off until your symptoms wane. For further advice on whether you'd qualify for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) speak to your GP and visit the GOV website:

www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay/overview

For further information and guidance on Employment

and the Equality Act 2010: www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/

Managing stress at work

Stress in the workplace affects many people, whether or not they have TS.

Stress can be even more difficult to cope with if it makes your tics worse, as often happens.

Here are some suggestions which might help you better manage stressful work days:

Take some deep breaths if you feel as if everything is getting on top of you. Things will slow down for a few seconds, and hopefully you will get some perspective back.

Take regular breaks, even if this means standing up and walking around for a couple of minutes. A regular break schedule is something that you could discuss with your employer as a possible reasonable adjustment

Exercising before or after work can help you to unwind and may help to release any excess energy resulting from suppressing tics.

Working in a quiet environment may help if loud noises set off your tics. Depending on where you work, this might be difficult, but it's worth asking people politely to talk more quietly, or to turn their music down if it helps you. You might also think about discussing the use of a quieter space with your employer.

If certain additives or stimulants make your tics worse, try cutting them out from your diet. Don't be afraid to speak to your employer about any stress you may be feeling. Your employer may have suggestions to help you and simply sharing your anxieties may help.

Responsibility of the employer

All employers have a duty not to treat disabled people unfavourably because of something connected with their disability. This goes beyond simply avoiding treating disabled people differently; the Equality Act requires employers to make reasonable adjustments in the work place to ensure that disabled people can access and progress in employment.

Reasonable adjustments

What is a reasonable step for an employer to take will depend on all the circumstances of each individual case, the Act does not specify any particular factors that should be taken into account.

Examples of steps it might be reasonable for employers

to have to take depend on what your job entails, but may include:

Assigning the disabled worker to a different place of work or training or arranging home working

Altering the disabled worker's hours of work or training

Making adjustments to premises

More examples of steps towards reasonable adjustments can be found in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's: Code of Practice on Employment:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/EqualityAct/employercode.pdf

Finding what is a reasonable adjustment, is not easy for people with TS, and harder still for an employer. It is a good starting point for an employer to conduct a proper assessment, in consultation with the person who has TS, of what reasonable adjustments may be required.

There is no onus on the worker to suggest what adjustments should be made (although it is good practice for employers to ask). Any suggestions made by the worker will need to be considered by the employer as to whether the suggested adjustments would help overcome the substantial disadvantage, and whether they are reasonable.

It is good practice for the employer to agree any proposed adjustments with the worker in question before they are made.

The Access to Work scheme may assist an employer to decide what steps to take. If financial assistance is available from the scheme, it may also make it reasonable for an employer to take certain steps which would otherwise be unreasonably expensive.

www.gov.uk/access-to-work

You could seek advice from a Disability Employment Advisor at your local Job Centre and; the charity Neuro Support, provide a free service called 'The Working Life' service which offers advice on adaptations to the workplace or job for people with neurological conditions:

Further information on the duty to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace can be found here:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/guidance-for-employers/the-duty-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-people/

Discrimination against a disabled person occurs where an employer fails to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments imposed on them in relation to that disabled person.

Discrimination in the workplace

UK law stands for zero policy on discrimination in the workplace, with the Equality Act 2010 set up to protect employees if this instance occurs. If you believe you have been unlawfully discriminated against by your employer, or a worker employed by them or their agent, in a work situation there are three things you can do:

Complain informally to your employer

Bring a grievance using your employer's grievance procedures

Make a complaint to the Employment Tribunal

For further information and guidance: www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/guidance-for-workers/what-to-do-if-you-believe-youve-been-discriminated-against/

Bullying

Bullying in the workplace is often overlooked: many think that adults will have grown out of the behaviour to belittle or make others feel bad about themselves.

However, workplace bullying is much more common than you think, although many people fail to realise it. Often, even if a person knows they are being bullied, they will tell no-one because they feel ashamed or embarrassed that they are still being bullied at their age, or they fear it will lead to losing their job.

Still, bullying in the workplace is unacceptable, and you should not tolerate it if a colleague tries to intimidate or humiliate you at your job.

The government website: www.gov.uk/workplace-bullying-and-harassment gives useful definitions of bullying and advice on action that you could take against bullying in the workplace

Resources

For further information and guidance on discrimination in the workplace:

The Equality Advisory Support Service (ESSA)

Gives information and advice about discrimination and human rights.

www.gov.uk/equality-advisory-support-service

Telephone: 0808 800 0082

Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm and Saturday, 10am to 2pm

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Helpline

This is the place to go for both employers and employees who are involved in an employment dispute or are seeking information on employment rights and rules. The Helpline provides clear, confidential, independent and impartial advice to assist the caller in resolving issues in the workplace.

www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1410

Helpline: 08457 47 47 47

Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm, Saturday, 9am to 1pm

Gov.co.uk

Offer information on formal procedures, and help and advice on solving work place disputes

www.gov.uk/solve-workplace-dispute

Other types of employment options for people with TS

Social Firms

According to Social Firms UK, a Social Firm is 'a market-led enterprise set up specifically to create good quality jobs for people disadvantaged in the labour market.' For further information on Social Firms visit www.socialfirms.co.uk.

Self-employment

Whilst self-employment may not be for everyone, and there are certainly risks as well as opportunities, there are some benefits that could help people with TS. For example, people can work at their own pace (and work the hours that best suit them), can release time when they need to, and might be able to delegate tasks that are difficult because of TS.

Anyone thinking about self-employment, with or without TS, must do their homework, and assess the market for their product or service, develop a viable plan, set themselves targets to achieve, and raise the finance needed to get the business going.

Work - Useful organisations and resources

Useful organisations that can offer employment/career information and advice:

Neurosupport

Offer employment support and support to finding employment for people with neurological condition:

www.neurosupport.org.uk/support-services.html

Advice Line: 0151 298 2999

Connexions Direct

Offers career advice - www.connexions-direct.com

Jobcentre Plus

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions and can offer help and advice on job hunting and advice on making benefit claim. To find information on your local office visit the government website:

www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus

The Shaw Trust

A national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently:

www.shaw-trust.org.uk/support_for_individuals

Rathbone

A UK-wide voluntary youth sector organisation providing opportunities for young people to transform their life-circumstances by re-engaging with learning, discovering their ability to succeed and achieving progression to further education, training and employment:

www.rathboneuk.org

0161 236 5358

SKILL (National Bureau for Students With Disabilities)

As a branch of Disability Alliance; SKILL provides advice and support to young people, promoting opportunities in education, training and employment across the UK:

www.skill.org.uk/youth/index.aspx

0800 328 5050

The Equality Advisory Support Service (ESSA)

Gives information and advice about discrimination and human rights.

www.gov.uk/equality-advisory-support-service

Telephone: 0808 800 0082

Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm and Saturday, 10am to 2pm

Gov.co.uk

Offer information on formal procedures, and help and advice on solving work place disputes:

www.gov.uk/solve-workplace-dispute

Gov.co.uk provide information on taking a case to an employment tribunal.

www.gov.uk/employment-tribunals

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice.htm