



A guide to Tourette's Syndrome

a quick-reference resource

Tourette's Syndrome

What is it?

Tourette's Syndrome (TS or Tourette's) is a common neurodevelopmental condition affecting 1 in 160 people. It is characterised by repetitive, involuntary movements and vocalisations called tics. TS typically starts in childhood and can continue into adulthood.

Up to 85% of people with TS may also have co-occurring conditions like ADHD, OCD, anxiety, and depression.

Tics

Tics can vary in severity and may change over time but can include:

- Blinking
- Coughing
- Throat clearing
- Shoulder shrugging
- Sniffing
- Facial movements

Also at least one vocal (phonic) tic which can include uncontrollable sounds like:

- Grunting
- Throat clearing
- Shouting of words or phrases

Tics are usually preceded by an unwanted urge in the muscles, known as a premonitory urge. They can sometimes be temporarily suppressed and often change in location, strength, and frequency, usually unnoticed by casual observers.

The intensity, duration and frequency of tics can be exacerbated by stress, anxiety, excitement, hunger, tiredness, or sensory changes, and decrease with exercise, distraction, or deep concentration.

Likewise, tics can be reduced with stress management techniques, self-care, diet, exercise, sleep, mood monitoring and self soothng exercises.

Workplace Strengths

Hyperfocus

Interpersonal awareness

Creativity

Planning ahead

Improvising

Problem solving

Resilience

Determination

Workplace Challenges

Discrimination and bullying

Negative social perception

Sensory sensitivities

Stress and anxiety exacerbates tics

Social anxiety

Reduced concentration when suppressing tics

Auditory processing

Tourette's Syndrome

Reasonable adjustments

- Allow for breaks as needed to support with fatigue and pain caused by tics and the fluctuating nature of TS.
- Implement strategies to support organisation, memory, and well-being such as workplace coaching.
- Provide a safe and private space for tic breaks. This can help to reduce stress and anxiety levels for those who prefer to tic in private and prevents the rebound effects that suppression can cause.
- Provide equipment such as an ergonomic desk/chair or specialised keyboard, and mouse.
- Some people with TS may occasionally need the use of a wheelchair or walking aids, so ensure the building is accessible.
- Sensory adjustments such as movement breaks can increase productivity by enabling people to get the sensory input they need to focus and function.
- Minimise exposure to triggers and distractions.
- Design sensory-friendly office spaces considering elements like lighting, noise, smells, and layout. This can benefit all employees, not just those with TS

Practical tips for colleagues and managers

Avoid Drawing Attention: Understand that tics are often more noticeable to the person experiencing them than to others.

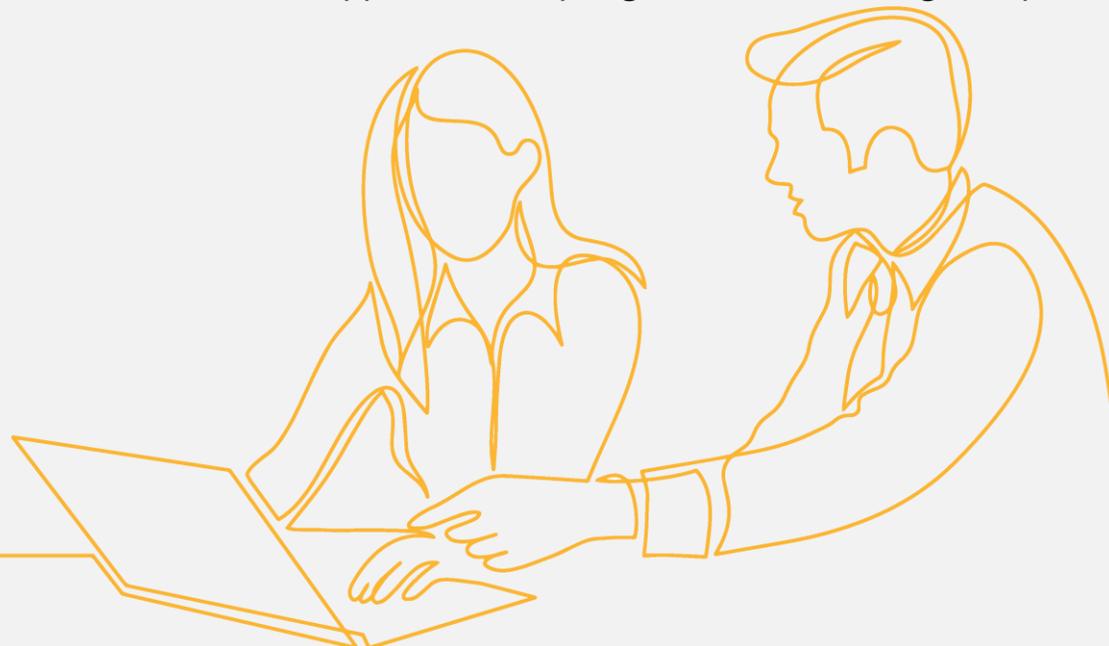
Be Patient: Stress and anxiety can exacerbate tics. A calm and supportive environment can help minimise them.

Use a Buddy System: Pair employees with TS with supportive colleagues who can answer questions or be a source of support

Use strengths-based approach: This socially accepting work culture is one of the most protective factors to someone with TS. Align to individual strengths, emphasise their skills and acknowledge contributions.

Employee Assistance Programmes: Provide access to counselling and support services.

Undertake training: Educate staff about TS to foster a supportive, accepting and understanding workplace culture



Common misconceptions

- Everyone with Tourette's swears or says inappropriate things.
- People with TS cannot control their tics.
- TS only involves vocal outbursts.

Facts

- **'Coprolalia'** – the clinical term for involuntary swearing – only affects a minority of people. **85% of people with TS do not have coprolalia**
- **Tics are involuntary**, but individuals can sometimes suppress them for short periods.
- TS includes **both motor and vocal tics**, which can vary in presentation

RESOURCES

1. [Tourettes Action](#)
2. [Tourette Scotland](#)
3. [Scope UK](#)

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