

What is CBIT and How Does it Work?

Comprehensive Behavioral Intervention for Tics (CBIT) helps people learn new behaviors to better manage tics. CBIT involves working with a trained clinician over several sessions and learning strategies to practice and use on your own.

Experts often describe tic disorders as “neurobehavioral.” This is a fancy way of saying that tics are caused by the brain and can change with different behaviors.

When most people with tics think about it, they will notice that their tics are usually much worse when they are in certain places or are doing certain activities. For instance, for some kids and teens, their tics may be at their worst when they are sitting in class. For others, tics may be at their worst at night right before bed.

Noticing the patterns of when your tics are at their most and least bothersome will be helpful for figuring out which behavioral strategies will be most helpful to use in order to help you gain more control over your tics.



What are “Tic Disorder Bullies”?

It can be helpful to think about tic disorders as bullies/monsters, with thoughts and wishes of their own that use tics to get what they want. For instance, a teen with tics may hate being the center of attention and may really like school and learning. However, their tic disorder may actually love attention and may want to do all it can to “get out of” sitting in class. Because of this, although the teen may not want to have any tics while they are at school, their tic disorder

bully may “make a lot of noise” at school (be really noticeable and annoying) in order to get the attention and freedom from class that it wants.

One goal of CBIT is to block tic disorder bullies from using tics to get what they want. The more regularly this is done, the more likely a tic disorder bully will learn that it can no longer control situations. When the bully learns this, it will usually stop trying to use tics to get what it wants.

Common Concerns about CBIT

Concern: *Tic Management Strategies will Backfire*

Some kids and their families are concerned that using tic management strategies will actually result in tics becoming more severe. This may be because for some, tics appear to increase after they get home from school or after they are in situations where they have had to “hold their tics in” throughout the day. Researchers have studied this by asking people to suppress their tics and measuring how many tics occurred before and after suppression. The results of these studies have *not* shown that tics increase after periods of suppression. In other words, a “rebound effect” has not been shown. It is possible that changes in tic frequency are more related to changes in situations (e.g., being in a different environment, experiencing stress or fatigue).

Concern: *Treating One Tic Will Make Untreated Tics Worse*

Some people are concerned that participating in CBIT may make untreated tics worse. Research has shown that untreated tics do not get worse after CBIT. In some cases, people actually feel more confident in managing all of their tics after CBIT, even those that weren’t specifically targeted. Sometimes, people will notice a temporary increase in tics during treatment as they pay more attention to their tics and their brain gets used to strengthening the “brake.” However, this increase is often temporary and decreases as the “brake” becomes stronger.

Concern: *Behavior Therapy Replaces an old Tic for a New Tic*

Sometimes people ask, “Is CBIT just replacing my tic with a new tic?” or “Will my tic blocker become a new tic?” However, there is no evidence that CBIT leads to new tics. Instead, CBIT helps the brain learn to respond to tics and tic urges in a new way.

CBIT Basics



Concern: *Paying More Attention to Tics Will Make Them Worse*

We know that talking about and paying attention to tics can result in a temporary increase in tics. For this reason, we often suggest that loved ones ignore tics, provide neutral responses to tics if needed, and have conversations about tics during times when tics occur less often.

However, during CBIT sessions, we do spend time talking about and paying attention to tics, so people may notice more tics during these activities. While this short-term increase may occur, our therapeutic focus on tics is intended to give you the awareness and skills to manage tics “on your terms.” By talking about tics during CBIT, people often gain more self-understanding and feel more empowered to manage tics that bother them.



Additional Resources

Please note that this represents an update of what is included in Chapters 1-2 in the [Managing Tourette Syndrome: A Behavioral Intervention Workbook, Parent Workbook](#) by Dr. Doug Woods and several other tic experts. Additional information comes from the [Tourette Association of America](#) (TAA) website. See [Find a Provider](#) page on the TAA website to explore treatment providers around the country.

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