

## What are Tics?

Tics are involuntary movements (motor tics) and vocalizations (voice tics) that can be stopped for brief periods. “Involuntary” means that the person is not doing them on purpose.

<b>Examples of Simple and Complex Tics</b>	
<i>Simple Motor Tics</i>	<i>Complex Motor Tics</i>
• Eye blinking	• Head nod + eye roll
• Eye roll	• Facial grimace
• Nose twitch	• Repetitive writing behaviors
• Head jerk	• Rotating hips
• Shoulder shrug	• Obscene Gestures
• Arm or stomach tensing	
<i>Simple Vocal Tics</i>	<i>Complex Vocal Tics</i>
• Grunting	• Syllables
• Animal noises	• Words
• Repeating syllables	• Phrases
• Throat clearing	• Repeating what someone else has said
• Sniffing	• Repeating oneself

## What are Tic Disorders?

Clinicians use three types of tic disorders for diagnosis:

1. Tourette’s Disorder (TD),
2. Persistent (Chronic) Motor or Vocal Tic Disorder (CTD), and
3. Provisional Tic Disorder (PTD).

The main symptoms of each disorder are tics. However, the disorders differ based on whether motor tics, vocal tics, or both types of tics are present, and how long the tics have been present.

# Tic Basics



<b>Criteria for Tourette's Disorder (TD)</b>
● Multiple motor tics and at least one vocal tic over the course of the disorder
● Tics have been present for at least one year, although their severity/frequency may not have been consistent during that time period
● Tics first started before age 18 years
● Tics are not caused by a substance or another medical condition

<b>Persistent (Chronic) Motor or Vocal Tic Disorder (CTD)</b>
● At least one or more motor tics or one or more vocal tics- but not both motor and vocal tics- have occurred over the course of the disorder
● Tics have been present for at least one year, although their severity/frequency may not have been consistent during that time period
● Tics first started before age 18 years
● Tics are not caused by a substance or another medical condition
● Tics have not ever met criteria for Tourette's Disorder

<b>Diagnostic Criteria for Provisional Tic Disorder (PTD)</b>
● At least one or more motor tics and/or vocal tics
● Tics have been present for less than one year
● Tics first started before age 18 years
● Tics are not caused by a substance or another medical condition
● Tics have not ever met criteria for Tourette's Disorder

## What are Premonitory Urges?

Many—though not all—adults, teens, and older kids with tics experience “inner tension” right before their tics. This is similar to how people without tics feel right before sneezing or when they hold their eyes open without blinking for a while.

Common Areas for Premonitory Urges	
• Left/right eye	• Palms of left/right hands
• Throat	• Back of left/right hands
• Left/right shoulders, blades	• Stomach
• Inside upper arm	• Front of left/right thigh

## What is the Natural Course of Tics?

Tics usually first start around age 5–7 years. After they first start, tics can get more frequent and intensify up until about age 10–12 years. Tics are usually at their worst at age 10-12 years.

Experts state that tic severity/frequency in adulthood follows the rule of thirds. Specifically, about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the people diagnosed with a tic disorder as a child will no longer have noticeable tics when they become adults. For the second  $\frac{1}{3}$  of people, tic frequency and severity will decrease when they become adults. The final  $\frac{1}{3}$  will not experience a change in tic severity when they become adults. Research generally shows that people are unlikely to totally “outgrow” tics. As the brain matures, it gets better at putting the brake on involuntary movements like tics.

Many kids have tics at some point during their childhood—as many as 25%. Scientists think this is a part of typical development. However, tics last longer for some people, such that they meet criteria for Tourette’s Disorder (TD) or Persistent (Chronic) Motor or Vocal Tic Disorder (CTD).

### 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](#) website. *Revised January, 2026*