

1. Facts & figures

- A tic disorder is characterized by a **repetitive and chronic pattern** of motor or **vocal tics** without a clear cause. A well-known tic disorder is Gilles de la Tourette.
- Tics are **sudden, repetitive, nonrhythmic motor movement or vocalization**. These movements are **not deliberate** and occur in episodes with a total duration of at least several months. **Tic-free episodes** of several weeks and/or months are possible.
- There can be **motor tics** which are movement-based tics affecting discrete muscle groups or **vocal tics** where involuntary sounds are produced.
- A distinction is also made between **simple or complex tics**. Complex tics last longer and several muscle groups are involved. They may seem deliberate but they are not.
- Tics are preceded by **premonitory urges**. Sometimes tics can be temporarily suppressed thanks to this preceding sensation.
- Tics develop before the age of 18. Typically symptoms evolve with age:
 - Most often children are about **5 to 6 years old** when tics first emerge.
 - A peak arises between the ages of **10 and 12**.
 - The severity of the tics **reduces in adolescence**.
 - For most individuals tics **disappear** around the age of **20**.
 - In a **small percentage** of individuals the tics **continue or even aggravate** in adulthood.
- In childhood tic disorder occurs in about **6% of the children**. In adults this percentage is only **1%**. Tic disorders are more common in men than women with a ratio of 3:1. Compulsive disorder and/or ADHD often co-occur.
- Tics students in **higher education** can have are:
 - Simple motor tics: sudden movements with a short duration that involve one muscle group e.g. eye blinking, nose sniffing, mouth skewing.

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- **Simple vocal tics:** expressing meaningless isolated sounds e.g. throat scraping, barking.
- **Complex motor tics:** a combination of simple motor tics e.g. head twisting and shoulder lifting or a complex coordinated movement involving several muscle groups e.g. squatting, hitting oneself, leaping.
- **Complex vocal tics:** linguistic correct and meaningful expressions e.g. shouting socially unaccepted words, repeating words or sentences.
- **Tics increase** when attention is drawn to the tics (e.g. when questions are asked about the tics), in situations when they are least wanted (during an exam) or in social situations that involve some sort of evaluation (presentation or exam).
- **Associated problems** can occur:
 - **Compulsory thoughts and behaviors.**
 - Suppressing tics or compulsions requires a lot of energy which **slows down the working pace**. There can be difficulties **planning tasks**, respecting appointments, and organizing study activities.
 - **Problems with fine motor and visuo-motor skills** can occur due to the tics, resulting in a messy and unreadable handwriting.
 - Motor tics can cause **physical injuries** when exerted with extreme force.
 - Many students with **mild to moderate tics experience little hinder** in their functioning. In case of **severe tics, impaired functioning** can occur. They experience shame, stress, depressive feelings, problems sleeping, anger attacks, psycho-somatic complaints and low self-esteem.

2. Focus points, tips & tricks

Attending classes

Focus points

- Tics cannot always be suppressed during classes.
- Tics can hamper taking readable, complete and well-structured **notes**.
- **Sustaining attention and being focused** is difficult due to the tics or the suppression hereof.

Tips and tricks

- Being allowed to leave the classroom and retreating to a **quiet space**, can give the opportunity to release the tension. This enhances the concentration and attention afterwards.
- When tics cannot be suppressed, they are best **ignored**.
- **Activating work forms and variation** improve the concentration.
- When PowerPoint slides are made available online before class, more complete and structured notes can be made. It also helps to **visualize the lesson structure** using schemes or charts. The use of a **laptop** to make notes can also help to make readable and complete notes.
- **Lecture recordings** that are made **available online after class**, offer the opportunity to review difficult passages and complete notes.

Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

- Making and following a **study plan** is not easy.
- Prioritizing and making correct time estimations is difficult and **deadlines** are sometimes missed.

Tips and tricks

- Providing **an overview** of all assignments and tasks in time helps to create an overview and make up an efficient study plan.
- **Study coaching** can be useful to help make up a realistic plan and help determine which tasks are proprietary, how much time can be spent on specific tasks , ...

Assignments

Focus points

- **Group assignments and presentations** are considered difficult and cause extra stress.
- Finishing tasks with the necessary precision and speed can be problematic.

Tips and tricks

- If this is not in contradiction with the learning goals, small **deviations with regard to the required precision** (2 to 4 mm) should be allowed. An **alternative assignment** can be considered if necessary.
- Besides **elaborating** on the assignment **in class**, the instructions are also best given **in writing**.
- For **oral presentations** it is best to implement a growth path (e.g. at the beginning of the study program the recording of the presentation on video, in a next step before a small group, finally in a larger group).
- In case of **group assignments** it is advisable to inform the fellow students to increase the understanding.

Exams

Focus points

- Not being able to suppress the tics can be disturbing. When suppression is possible this often interferes with **concentration and speed**.
- It can be difficult to **write readable**.

Tips and tricks

- Taking exams in a **smaller room** where there is understanding for the tics is supportive.
- It is recommendable to allow **leaving the room** under supervision in case of severe and disturbing tics.
- **Extra time** for the preparation of an oral exam or for a written exam can help compensate for the concentration and speed difficulties.
- Making an exam on a **laptop** can be helpful.

Internships

Focus points

- Tics can be very awkward in new situations such as an internship. **Stress, shame and anxiety** can hamper the functioning.
- **Concentration difficulties and exhaustion** due to the tics can hinder normal functioning during an internship.

Tips and tricks

- **Concretizing the expectations of the internship** and a **prospection** at the internship location well in advance can be supportive. Uncertainties can be clarified and additional information can be requested.
- Providing an **adjusted internship location** is sometimes required and agreements can be made on the **information that is transferred** to the local staff.

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- Spreading an internship over a longer period of time can be useful in case of exhaustion.
- Providing a quiet room at the facility where the student can retreat is advisable.

Student life

Focus points

- Participation in student activities and the associated social contacts with peers can be challenging.
- The tics can have an impact on the general well-being. Stress, anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem can occur.

Tips and tricks

- Leisure activities and participation in student activities should be encouraged.
- A fixed contact person in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- Staff members of student facilities provide for coaching in case of psycho-social problems.