

Tourette's Disorder Symptoms

The essential features of Tourette's Disorder are multiple motor tics and one or more vocal tics, expressing themselves many times a day for at least 1 year. These may appear simultaneously or at different periods during the illness.

The anatomical location, number, frequency, complexity, and severity of the tics change over time. The tics typically involve the head and, frequently, other parts of the body, such as the torso and upper and lower limbs. The vocal tics include various words or sounds such as clicks, grunts, yelps, barks, sniffs, snorts, and coughs.

Coprolalia, a complex vocal tic involving the uttering of obscenities, is present in a few individuals (less than 10%) with this disorder.

Complex motor tics involving touching, squatting, deep knee bends, retracing steps, and twirling when walking may be present. In approximately one-half the individuals with this disorder, the first symptoms to appear are bouts of a single tic, most frequently eye blinking, less frequently tics involving another part of the face or the body. Initial symptoms can also include tongue protrusion, squatting, sniffing, hopping, skipping, throat clearing, stuttering, uttering sounds or words, and coprolalia. The other cases begin with multiple symptoms.

Specific Symptoms of Tourette's Disorder

- Both multiple motor and one or more vocal tics have been present at some time during the illness, although not necessarily concurrently. (A tic is a sudden, rapid, recurrent, nonrhythmic, stereotyped motor movement or vocalization.)
- The tics occur many times a day (usually in bouts) nearly every day or intermittently throughout a period of more than 1 year, and during this period there was never a tic-free period of more than 3 consecutive months.
- The disturbance causes marked distress or significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The onset is before age 18 years.
- The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., stimulants) or a general medical condition (e.g., Huntington's disease or postviral encephalitis).