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Tourette
THE PATH FOR INCLUSION
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Dealing with (Severe) Tics in a Demanding Academic Setting

For Young with TS

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TOURETTE
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What are tics? Are they controllable?

It is extremely important for patients to know, as well as to explain to other students, teachers, and all members of the academic community, what tics are. Tics are rapid, repetitive, and stereotyped movements or vocalizations that involve one or more muscle groups. They are involuntary or “semi-voluntary” and may resemble movements or behaviors from everyday life.

Understanding and comprehending tics is the first step towards managing them. They are fluctuating, aggravated by factors such as stress and anxiety, and can be suggestible. Suppressing tics can affect academic performance. For someone who does not have tics, imagining being prevented from scratching when they feel itchy may be a good exercise.

It is essential to address the factors that influence tics, whether internal, such as anxiety, excitement, or anger, or external, such as being around certain people, specific classes, watching television, or environmental responses (for example, asking someone to leave due to tics, reactions of teasing or provocation, or certain responses to particularly expressive tics). It is important to intervene with key figures in the patient’s life so that they can provide an environment conducive to managing the tics.

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Be aware of your tics and urges to tic

When you feel an urge to tic, try a competing behavior. For example, instead of a vocal tic, do a breathing sound or a quiet mouth movement

Most authors consider cognitive-behavioral interventions the first-line treatment for Tourette syndrome, particularly if the interventions include Habit Reversal Therapy (HRT). HRT aims to help the patient become more aware of the occurrence of tics and the premonitory sensations that precede them, so that an alternative response can be developed to interrupt or inhibit a tic. The intervention does not aim to eliminate a premonitory sensation, but rather to replace the tic with a more discreet movement.

Sitting near a door may be important

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Apply relaxing techniques, especially when you are feeling more anxious

If you take medication prescribed by your medical doctor, never forget to take it daily

Identify major triggers of tics in each context and try to control or prevent triggers

Tutoring – it could be beneficial for you to have a tutor

Use technology. The key word is inclusion, but when tics are very severe, it may be beneficial for you to be in a separate room while still attending the class in real time. You may sometimes benefit from remote access classes, e.g., via Zoom.

Ask for more time to complete tasks and assessments

Manage the workload and break tasks into smaller steps; setting aside time for breaks can prevent mental or physical overload, which can aggravate tics

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Inform professors and peers: Although not mandatory, it is helpful for you to talk to professors and peers about your condition so that you can be understood and offered support if needed

Joining support groups for people with Tourette Syndrome can provide an emotional support network and a space for sharing experiences

Make changes in your daily activities. For example, try spending a portion of leisure time on physical activities

Choose the class schedule more suitable for you

You may use alternatives to writing notes on paper — computers, iPads, tablets, and audio recordings are good options

It may be necessary to activate special contingency strategies and measures at the university

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Sleep enough hours, with quality. A short total sleep time can be an aggravating factor for tics

A welcoming and non-judgmental environment is essential for students with Tourette Syndrome, as it can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, which are factors that often worsen tics. When people feel understood and accepted, they tend to experience less pressure and shame, contributing to a decrease in emotional tension.

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