

Tourette Syndrome: A Commonly Misunderstood Condition

> *"Tourette Syndrome is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects children, adolescents and adults. The condition is characterized by sudden, involuntary movements and/or sounds called tics. Tics can range from mild/inconsequential to moderate and severe, and are disabling in some cases."*
>
> (source: Tourette Association of America)

Tourette Syndrome is more than swearing uncontrollably. Swearing, also known as Coprolalia, is only found in 10% of Tourettes patients. This complex disease often comes with other mental health maladies rendering subjects at the mercy of their conditions all day. The only way to eliminate the misunderstandings surrounding Tourettes is to educate the

public about the disease and encourage self-advocacy for those suffering with Tourette Syndrome.

Mental health disorders associated with Tourette Syndrome involve the same brain circuits as Tourettes. The most common condition that "comes with" Tourette Syndrome is OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). OCD and Tourette Syndrome go hand-in-hand, as they are both responsible for controlling movements, habits, impulses and repetitive behaviors. Other secondary, but notable conditions associated with Tourette Syndrome include ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder), mood disorders (ie: Bi-polar Disorder), depression, autism, and anxiety.

A person facing Tourette Syndrome, especially one with many of the aforementioned conditions, is dealing with insurmountable challenges. They could be forgetful, impulsive, easily distracted, obsessive, wiggly, moody, depressed, anxious, and annoying all in the same day (or in the same moment!). They are in a constant state of managing their tics with little relief. They constantly have to explain themselves to others or deal with scrutiny. Shouting swears in a crowded restaurant, for example, is disruptive and unexpected for patrons.

The "inappropriate" part of our brain that hosts the thoughts associated with Tourettes include swearing, racial slurs, sexual gestures, offensive language or phrases, and sometimes, even

unwanted sexual touch. In those with Tourettes, this part of the brain is misfiring, or not working properly. The shocking nature of these symptoms are why they are most well-known.

It is important for the public to recognize that the symptoms of Tourette Syndrome are involuntary, intrusive to the patient, and often embarrassing. People with Tourette Syndrome have no way of controlling what is happening to them, even if it seems otherwise. They don't set out in the morning to offend others - it just happens. Similar to a sneeze, the person with Tourette Syndrome has no control over what is happening.

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, everyone understands what that it entails and how horrific it can be. When someone is diagnosed with Tourettes, many people are in the dark. The more the public is educated about Tourettes, the more understanding society can have for sufferers of this horrible, uncontrollable condition.

The next time you hear about Tourette Syndrome, take a moment to educate yourself and others. It would mean the world to so many suffering with this intolerable disorder.