

ASK THE MEDICAL ADVISORY BOARD

In each issue, a member of TSA's Medical Advisory Board addresses medical questions that affect people with TS and their families. This issue has two contributors, Allan L. Naarden, M.D., Medical City, TX, and Louise Kiessling, M.D., Memorial Hospital, RI.

Q Some of my six-year-old son's tic symptoms look like seizures. His EEG shows some electrical activity, and his physician suggested we put him on anti-seizure medication. During these "seizure/tic" episodes he is fully alert and has said, "I don't want to do this, but I have to." Is there a connection between TS and these symptoms?

A Because he remains alert and states that he feels a sense of urgency to perform these symptoms, it would seem likely that the tic symptoms are pure TS and his EEG abnormalities are not related.

"Seizure Disorder" is a clinical diagnosis that does not require an abnormal EEG to make a diagnosis. Also, of the 800 plus patients with TS I've seen, we have identified only three people with a seizure disorder. When we did EEG's on 120 TS patients we found that 10% of them had some EEG abnormality, but they were usually quite non-specific. In summary, I don't believe that people with TS are at any more risk of having seizures than anyone else.

— L. Kiessling, M.D.

Q My husband has TS. Our children are ages 4 and 2. They show no signs of having TS. I am 38 years old and we are thinking about having another child. Will my age increase the chances of the baby having TS, as is the case with Down Syndrome?

A Although most of the questions about TS and genetics are yet to be answered, it does appear that about 20% of those with TS have a first degree relative (child, parent, sibling) who at one time or another during their lives may have had a TS symptom.

In answer to your question about your age, I know of no information that would indicate that the age of either parent could be considered as a risk factor for the development of TS.

Q Our pharmacist told us that there has been a recent warning about taking Anafranil (clomipramine) and Tenex (guanfacine) in combination. Is this true?

A Anafranil is prescribed to control OC symptoms. It is a tricyclic anti-depressant and is related to Tofranil (imipramine). Tenex is used to control attentional deficits (and possibly movements and noises). Used in combination, the question of potential heart-related side effects is raised because Anafranil may affect electrical conduction (this rarely causes clinical symptoms and doesn't require withdrawal from the medication) and Tenex may have the side effect of an increased or decreased heart rate (this side effect is not a common occurrence). There is some evidence that when used in combination the Anafranil may interfere with the antihypertensive effect of the Tenex, but I know of no study that has evaluated this potential interaction. If you are concerned, you may want to take a different medication for OC, e.g. one of the serotonin reuptake inhibitors. As always, discuss your concerns with your physician.

Q I had been on TS medication for some time when my symptoms disappeared. I stopped taking the medication and three months later the symptoms returned. I began taking the medication again but this time it didn't help reduce my symptoms—even after a month of medication. What should I do?

A You've raised one of the most important treatment issues concerning effective medication of TS symptoms. Some people have a level of severity of symptoms that does not fluctuate. Others see a reduction of symptoms after puberty, and the symptoms remain dormant into adult life.

Many of my patients have a fluctuating course of symptoms that seems to be cyclical—symptoms increase over a three to four month period and then decrease over a similar period of time. Sometimes symptom-free periods last a long time and one begins to think that the TS is in remission. Because of these fluctuations it is not clear whether the reduction of symptoms was caused by the medication or the natural waxing and waning of TS symptoms.

I try to judge the effectiveness of medications by having my patients keep careful diaries, noting their symptom history before and after taking a medication. I determine if a particular medication is effective after a period of six to eight months. This length of time will help account for the natural "upswings" and "downswings" of symptoms.

If you start taking a new medication during a natural "upswing" you may mistakenly blame the new medication for your increased symptoms. On the other hand, a natural "downswing" may lead you to credit a new medication for reducing your symptoms.

Discuss your options with your physician. Perhaps your dosage should be increased or you may need to try another medication. Always monitor your side effects carefully.

— A. L. Naarden, M.D.

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