

Ask The MEDICAL ADVISORY BOARD

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I'm a 32 year old woman with severe vocal tics that interfere with my job. Are there medications that are known to successfully treat vocalizations?

Vocalizations are sometimes more difficult to treat than simple motor tics. Nonetheless, the treatment of the two is similar and involves the use of standard, albeit imperfect drugs such as the typical dopamine blockers fluphenazine (Permitil/Prolixin), haloperidol (Haldol) and pimozide (Orap).

Less well studied drugs include the atypical dopamine blockers olanzapine (Zyprexa), risperidone (Risperdal), ziprasidone (Geodon), and more recently, aripiprazole (Abilify). The experience with these medications is limited, and thus it is currently impossible to endorse them unequivocally.

We know that some physicians are beginning to try them "off label." This experience has not crystallized into a useful set of guidelines. Although physicians suspect the newer medications may be easier to tolerate than the old ones, this remains to be tested directly in TS. Weight gain is a problem with both groups, but appears to be less of a problem with ziprasidone (Geodon) and aripiprazole (Abilify™) when compared to others.

Alpha agonists e.g. clonidine (Catapres) and guanfacine (Tenex) may be somewhat less effective than the medications cited above in treating vocal tics. Tetrabenazine (Nitoman) is available outside the U.S. and may be helpful in selected cases. More recently, a few groups have used injections of botulinum toxin in very severe cases to partially weaken the vocal cords. This can result in a temporary softening of the voice and a significant improvement in vocal (and perhaps other) tics that can last several months. Repeated injections are required to have a sustained effect. Because this is a relatively invasive procedure, careful selection of patients is very important. For this reason we recommend that patients who are contemplating this approach seek consultation in centers with special expertise in both botulinum toxin injections and TS.

The most common explanation for lack of response to well established tics, vocal or otherwise, is failure to reach adequate doses of medication. This may be due to the dose limiting side effects of a particular drug. Other times it is due to inadequate dosing, particularly with the newer medications. Also, tics may be poorly controlled because symptoms of other disorders sometimes associated with

TS are also poorly controlled. These conditions could include anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive symptoms or the behavioral symptoms of ADHD. Depression, poor sleep and stimulant-type drugs may also contribute to out-of-control tics. Under these circumstances, the treatment of these conditions may prove a far more effective way to treat vocal tics than adding or changing the above medications.

I have read a lot recently that people with TS are extremely sensitive to sugar and caffeine. Do these substances increase tics in some people?

People vary a great deal in their sensitivity to these and other substances. For some, wide fluctuations in blood sugar can be as distressing as coffee intoxication (i.e., wired from too much coffee), or coffee withdrawal. In susceptible individuals, these fluctuations may occur several times a day. Each time these fluctuations occur, the individual may experience an "adrenaline rush" which the body interprets as stress. Moreover, in people who already have tics, stress is likely to aggravate the tics before other symptoms of stress become apparent.

TSA's 2nd Florida Dinner & Auction



Held on Saturday, May 3rd at the DCOTA Design Center in Dania, FL the event was a huge success. Fifteen-year-old Brian Bodzin and Fourteen-year-old Anthony Carriuolo were two of the movers and shakers behind the fundraiser.

Victories

Pageant Queen

Janelle Guenette doesn't let anything—not even TS—get in the way of her goals. Twelve-year-old Janelle took first runner-up in the Miss Massachusetts Outstanding Pre-Teen Pageant. Her presentation was on understanding TS and accepting people with disabilities. Janelle loves to sing, studies voice and attends the Burt Wood School of Performing Arts. She aspires to a career as a performer.

Community Leader

Eighteen-year-old Jackie Espinoza is an exceptional student and well on her way to becoming a leader in her community. As president of Interact, a service club sponsored by Rotary International, Jackie has organized events at local senior citizen centers, settlement houses and foster homes. As the eldest of three children with TS, it was important for her to lead the way in acceptance of TS. She succeeded in educating her high school of 2,400. A page in the yearbook has been dedicated to Jackie.

