

Children suffering from tics helped by both group and individual therapy

August 30 2018



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Around 15 percent of all children have tics, and up to one percent of these children have tics that are classified as chronic. In the case of Tourette's syndrome, tics continue for more than a year and include both vocal and motor tics. This disorder can be debilitating for a child,

according to Danish researcher Judith Becker Nissen.

Therapy against [tics](#) works, and both group and individual treatment are suitable methods to achieve a good effect, according to Nissen and a group of Danish researchers who compared the effect of different types of tic training based on a new Danish manual. This means that therapists in the future can plan a much better course of treatment for those children who have difficulty with tics. The research has been published in *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*.

Nissen, an associate professor at the Department of Clinical Medicine at Aarhus University and a consultant at the Centre for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Risskov under the Central Denmark Region, says, "The study confirms that children and young people with tics can be effectively treated by training in accordance with the strategies that are described in the manual we have developed. This treatment can take place both in groups and individually. This means that many more children and [young people](#) can be offered relevant treatment, which is very welcome news for the affected families.

"Some children suffer from tics to such an extent that they must be given pain relief. They can find it difficult to concentrate, for example because they struggle to keep the tics in check so they don't disturb their classmates, or because their blinking tics make it difficult to focus. In addition, a child who makes strange noises or sudden movements can suffer bullying. We therefore need to help these children get treatment, even though we know that tics often decrease as the brain matures. But the early years are so crucial for a child's development, thus everything that may reduce tics intensity and frequency needs to be done."

The results from the research provide important information for parents who are naturally interested in whether their tic-suffering children are being offered the most effective treatment. According to Nissen, it is

particularly important to know the effects of group therapy. "Some parents are concerned that in group therapy, their child will copy the other children's tics and end up with more of them. On the contrary, the children in group therapy are given a selection of exercises that can support them in developing strategies that they and their parents can use if new tics turn up later in their lives."

Together with her colleagues, Nissen has compiled experience and data from the work with children and parents. These experiences are now gathered in the first Danish manual, available for therapists and affected families to use. It qualifies previous instructions, among other things, because it is based on Danish data, explains Judith Becker Nissen.

"It has the advantage of both describing individual and [group therapy](#) and of combining multiple methods, so the children are given a broad repertoire of methods and strategies. Previously, we've relied on American and other guidelines, but cultural differences and experience may play a role for treatment outcome, so it is valuable that Danish [children](#) and their parents contribute to the manual," says Judith Becker Nissen.

More information: Judith B. Nissen et al, Combined habit reversal training and exposure response prevention in a group setting compared to individual training: a randomized controlled clinical trial, *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s00787-018-1187-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-018-1187-z)

Provided by Aarhus University

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