
HABIT REVERSAL TRAINING AND COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS FOR TICS

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Habit reversal training (HRT) (or Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Tics - CBIT) is a set of procedures that have been used very successfully with **trichotillomania (hair pulling), nail biting, thumbsucking, chronic motor tics, and the tics associated with Tourette disorder**. There are no known side effects, but you should know that both HRT and CBIT take daily practice to work. Fortunately, around 10-15 minutes of daily practice is usually enough.



The goal of HRT/CBIT is not to *suppress* tics/habits, but to learn to recognize when tics/habits are about to occur and then to initiate a *competing response*, something that is unlikely to be observable by others.

Also, you should know that the program may not work as well if your child has other untreated psychiatric disorders like ADHD, anxiety, depression, etc. HRT/CBIT *can* still work in these cases, but it's also important to get treatment for any other issues too, for HRT/CBIT to work best.

Another thing to know is that if the behaviors are truly tics (resulting from a neurological disorder), CBIT doesn't usually make tics go away completely. Although children can learn to control tics through CBIT, it's unlikely they'll be able to control them all, and they may develop new tics. It's important to remember that this is a result of the disorder. It is NOT a known side effect of CBIT. In other words, if new tics develop while you're using CBIT, research and clinical experience both support that these come from the disorder, not the treatment. Fortunately, CBIT can be easily adapted for new tics.

HRT/CBIT is usually a short term treatment. Studies that show the best results used 8 sessions over 10 weeks, but that's because most studies require participants to have at least moderately severe tics to qualify. For milder levels of symptoms, treatment is usually briefer. In one major study, tic severity was reduced by 52.5%, compared to 18% in the control.

Your child does *not* have to stop taking anti-tic medication to participate in CBIT.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS AT HOME

INCREASE YOUR CHILD'S AWARENESS OF THE HABIT

- Have your child look in a mirror while performing the habit on purpose every day. Help your child to become aware of how the body moves and what muscles are being used during the habit.
- Have your child identify each time he starts his habit by raising his hand when the habit occurs or by saying, "that was one," when the habit occurs. If you see your child doing the habit and your child does not notice, signal him with a gesture or expression that you both have agreed to use.
- Track the habit. *Habitica* is a free app that turns habit tracking into a fun game, which many children enjoy. There are other apps too, if you don't like *Habitica*.

PRACTICE THE COMPETING RESPONSE DAILY

- A competing response is an action your child does in place of his habit. The muscles used to do the new action make it impossible to perform the old habit. For example, instead of doing an eye blink tic, the child would be encouraged to very gently close his eyelids and hold them closed for 10 seconds.

Your child's competing response is _____.

- Have your child practice his competing response in the mirror. This helps him become comfortable with the response and helps show whether the competing habit is noticeable socially.
- Encourage your child to use the competing response when he feels the urge to start the habit.
- Encourage your child to use the competing response in situations where the habit often occurs
- Encourage your child to use the competing response for 1 minute after each time the habit occurs

HELP YOUR CHILD

- Feedback: Work with your child to help him be aware of his habit by helping him identify the habit when it occurs.
- Support and Encouragement: Encourage your child to use the competing response and praise him when he does so. Praise your child when you notice the habit is starting to go away.
- Effort: Remember, although many children and adolescents will notice a decrease in their habit within a couple of days, the greatest change from using these habit reversal procedures occurs during the second and third month. Don't give up after only a couple of days or weeks.

RELATED LINKS

- Video introduction to Habit Reversal Training: <https://childmind.org/article/how-habit-reversal-therapy-works-for-tics/>
- Review from Tourette's Association of America (same principles apply to any type of tic or "habit" – does not have to be Tourette's-related): <http://www.tourette.org/research-medical/cbit-overview/>
 - CBIT Brochure: <http://www.tourette.org/media/TAACBITenglish101316final.pdf>
 - Includes useful FAQs
- You may consider trying a "Keen" watch: <https://www.habitaware.com/>. This is not necessary for treatment, but some people like them.