

Trichotillomania

Trichotillomania is a mental health disorder characterized by the persistent urge to repeatedly pull out hair from all over the body. Although hair pulling can occur anywhere on the body, the most common sites of hair pulling are the scalp, eyelashes, and eyebrows. Hair pulling can lead to patchy bald spots, which may also lead to emotional distress or impair functioning at school, work, or in social settings.

Signs & Symptoms

Most people with trichotillomania pull their hair in private and try to hide the disorder from others. Its onset may be caused or accompanied by various emotional states, such as anxiety, boredom, or stress. Someone with trichotillomania might:

- Repeatedly pull out hair from their body (sites may change over time)
- Have an increasing sense of tension before pulling or when trying to refrain from pulling
- Have a sense of calmness or relief after pulling
- Noticeable hair loss on certain parts of the body that cannot be explained by other factors
- Biting, chewing, or eating pulled out hair

Causes & Risk Factors

There is no exact known cause for trichotillomania, but factors thought to contribute to its development are a combination of genetics and the individual's environment. Risk factors for developing trichotillomania include but are not limited to:

- A family history of trichotillomania
- Age- development most frequently occurs in early teens between 10-13 years old
- Severely stressful situations
- History of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive disorder

Diagnosis & Treatment

A doctor can diagnose an individual with trichotillomania by examining how much hair has been lost, asking questions about the hair loss, and identifying if there are any other physical or mental health problems associated with hair pulling. Treatment plans commonly consist of therapy such as habit reversal training, cognitive therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy. Some medications like antidepressants may also be prescribed. Support groups can help individuals with trichotillomania because most people report feeling alone in the experience, so sharing their feelings with others who have the disorder can be beneficial.

Sources – Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/trichotillomania/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20355193>
and Mental Health America: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/trichotillomania-hair-pulling>