

What is Trichotillomania?

Trichotillomania (repetitive hair pulling) is a silent epidemic affecting between 5 and 10 million people in America alone. Sufferers experience tremendous medical, psychological, and social impact as a result of their hair pulling.

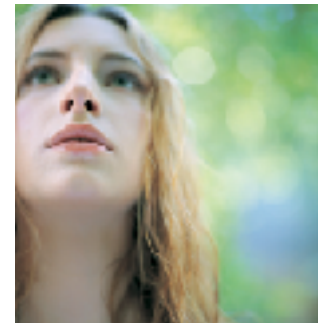
Trichotillomania is currently defined as:

- Recurrent pulling of one's own hair resulting in noticeable hair loss,
- an increasing sense of tension immediately before pulling out the hair or when attempting to not pull,
- pleasure, gratification, or relief when pulling out the hair,
- the disturbance is not better accounted for by another mental disorder and is not due to a dermatological condition, and
- the disturbance causes significant distress or disturbance in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. (APA, 1994).

Many people do not meet all of these criteria, but still pull their hair to a bothersome degree and want to stop. This program is designed to help people who pull their hair and want to stop.

How many people have trich?

- Between 1.5% and 3.4% of the population meets criteria for trichotillomania.
- As many as 15% of people may pull for "non-grooming" purposes, without actually creating bald spots.
- Overall estimates of people who pull their hair for non-grooming purposes are likely between 3 and 15% of the population.



For those who suffer in silence . . .

You are not alone.



The facts about pulling:

- People pull from varying sites on the body, including the scalp, eyelashes, eyebrows, pubic region, face and extremities.
- Some people pull from specific spots resulting in bald areas, while others pull in a sparse pattern, thus creating a thin appearance. Still others who engage in daily pulling may exhibit complete baldness on the scalp or other parts of their bodies, or even a total loss of eyelashes or eyebrows.
- More than half of people with trichotillomania, or "trich", report pulling hairs that are "coarse," "thick," or "kinky." Because repeated pulling can cause normal hair to grow out more coarse or curly, people can create a cycle that leads to greater pulling of those particular hairs.
- Touching the hair usually comes before pulling and pulling is often done with the fingers.
- 43% of people in a large clinical sample reported using tweezers at least part of the time.
- After pulling, it is common for people to play with or stroke the hair and/or root.
- Often, the pulled hair is examined for a large or whole root, which for many people is the purpose for pulling the hair.
- Oral behaviors are common in people with trich. Running the hair along the mouth or lips or even biting off the root are common activities.
- About one-third of patients bite off the root, while up to 18% of patients with trich ingest the whole hair (trichophagy).

Problems hair pulling can cause:

Psychological Problems

- Many people with trich report feeling depressed or unattractive due to hair pulling,
- Oftentimes, people with trich express feelings of shame, irritability, and low self-esteem secondary to their pulling.
- Most people with trich keep their hair pulling secret from their loved ones, supporting the notion that people with trich live in hiding or in silence about their symptoms.

Social Problems

- People with hair loss due to pulling tend to avoid certain activities such as professional hair cuts, swimming, sports, intimate sexual encounters, and windy or well-lit places.

- In addition to avoiding relationships and places, many people with trich wear wigs, false eyelashes, scarves, hats or other hair "appliances" to cover the loss. Those with less obvious hair loss are able to cover it by styling the hair in a certain fashion or wearing make-up to cover bald areas.
- Hair pulling can become a source of relationship turmoil, such as nagging from a spouse or parent; degrading remarks or put downs from friends or loved ones which can feel like punishment for the behavior; being accused of not trying hard enough to stop; and, rude or insensitive remarks from strangers or acquaintances.

Medical Problems

- Repeated pulling of the hair can lead to damage to the hair follicle, which can affect hair re-growth.
- Damaged follicles will produce gray or white hair, and often hair that is more coarse or kinky, which can lead to more pulling.
- Skin damage from pulling, picking, scratching or the use of tweezers can lead to serious infections requiring medical attention.
- Hair biting has been reported to cause gum disease and enamel erosion on the teeth.
- Hair ingestion can lead to the development of gastric and/or intestinal trichobezoars (hair balls) which can be life threatening and, when large, must be surgically removed.
- Repetitive hair pulling can lead to muscle fatigue and can result in carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Avoidance of regular doctor visits out of fear of embarrassment or discovery can increase the chances that medical problems will go undetected.

Reference:

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.