

# Literally, pulling their hair out

**MOST** people don't know that pulling hair is a disorder and has a name. It's called trichotillomania (TTM), a disorder of shame and embarrassment.

Oftentimes, people go to great lengths to hide this behaviour for fear of how others might perceive them.

It affects an estimated eight to 11 million people, and this number might even be underestimated due to the secretiveness of this disorder. It frequently begins in pre- or early adolescence, the average age being around 12 years old.

Trichotillomania is an impulse disorder. Sufferers will be inclined to pull their hair from their body, particularly the scalp, eyebrows, and eyelashes.

It happens when sufferers of this disorder experience an increase in tension which they alleviate with pulling hair as that action gives them a feeling of pleasure or relief after doing so.

Trying to understand the etiology of trichotillomania is very difficult and complex, and health professionals are often in disagreement as to its cause.

Some believe it is a type of obsessive compulsive disorder and is a result of feelings of loss or

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perceived threats.

Others contend that it is because of neurobiological factors and is similar in nature to Tourette's syndrome, as they are both repetitive behaviours.

Still others feel that it is a coping mechanism, in response to stress and anxiety, or it could be a self-injurious behaviour.

Hair pulling is  
an anxiety  
reduction

process, whereby the person associates the behaviour with relaxation.

When assessing clients with trichotillomania, I go into great detail in the interview process with regard to the history of their hair pulling.

I ask them when it started, how it occurs, what their behaviours are, how often they do it, what they feel the cause is, how strong their desire is to stop, and much more.

I will consider the severity, and if there is any concern regarding infections or self-mutilation, I will refer such clients to their doctor.

Hypnosis and imagery are very effective modalities to reduce and eliminate symptoms as they teach clients to identify what the triggers are and to teach them stress relief tools. The clients are next given positive replacement strategies.

It is also common for people with trichotillomania to suffer from additional problems such as depression, which need to be addressed by the hypnotherapist.

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