

# Trichotillomania

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(Pronounced Tric-o-til-lo-mane-e-ah). A really different word to pronounce in order to explain "obsession" of an uncontrollable urge to pull out one's own hair. This condition eventually leaves bald patches on part or all of the scalp. It can also involve the eyelashes, eyebrows and any other body hair.

Trichotillomania is a baffling compulsive anxiety disorder for which there is no proven cause. The cures may also be difficult to find. There is no set age for starting this ritual.

People who pull their hair might think they are alone and suffer in silence. Most will try to hide it, but it is not always easy. Many hair pullers will go into a dark depression and suffer from low self-esteem if they decide to keep it a secret and not seek treatment. Today, with the Internet, it has helped some realize that they cannot fight this alone. There are options for treatment that can help control the urge to pull. Usually, family doctors will know to refer to a psychologist, psychiatrist, or other specialist who can help trichotillomania patients. There are special medications and therapy options that can help strengthen the resistance to these urges.

Approximately 10 years ago, I met a 17-year-old girl that was in a very desperate state of hair pulling. Her psychologist had recommended she try wearing a wig for awhile, along with her therapist's visits. We talked for quite some time, and she decided to purchase a long shoulder-length wig to see if it would help her situation. She phoned me a year later – she had found a job and had quit pulling her hair. So, sometimes, it takes courage for a long time in order to pursue your goals.

Another client would avoid her hairstylist, especially if she had a bad week of anxiety. She just didn't want anyone to see what she had done to her scalp, eyelashes and eyebrows. These terrified clients certainly don't want comments on their condition or have to explain what has happened to them. Sometimes, this client would switch hairdressers for that reason. She felt most vulnerable in a salon, not being able to hide all of this from someone who was going to look closely at her hair.

An important message to retain from these young women is the fact that they don't want to have the perception from the general public that pulling of their hair is done on purpose. It is no fault of their own - they just can't help from pulling; and yes, there is pain, both emotional and physical.

Maybe if you meet someone who has trichotillomania, you will understand the meaning of it and be able to speak openly, but privately, to them and let them know that there is hope when you are literally pulling your hair out.