



Search

All+

Trichotillomania



GUIDES

What Is It

Trichotillomania is a disorder characterized by the urge to pull out hair from the scalp or other parts of the body, including the eyelashes, brows, genitals, back, arms and legs. Children are more likely to pull hair out from the scalp. Some with the disorder say pulling hair makes them feel good, but not everyone with trichotillomania pulls out hair intentionally. Kids often pull unconsciously, and may not even remember doing so. Others develop rituals, removing hairs of certain textures or colors, or hair from specific locations, although this is less likely in children. Some people with trichotillomania also compulsively eat their hair after pulling it out.



Search

All+

Trichotillomania



GUIDES

What to Look For

Signs a child might have this disorder include rapid or asymmetrical hair loss, hair on the floor and pillows, and having hands constantly near the head. Wearing hats or other cover-ups and constantly checking mirror reflections may also be signs of the disorder. Some children describe feeling a release of tension after pulling out their hair, although those who pull unconsciously won't experience this sensation. When asked, many children deny pulling out their hair (and, indeed, may really not remember ever doing it). Some kids with trichotillomania have rituals surrounding their hair pulling and may play with the hair afterwards, rolling or

bending it, or putting it to their lips. Because severe hair pulling has an effect on a child's appearance, it can be damaging to self-esteem and may interfere with social life and performance in school. Onset commonly occurs around 12 years of age, but it can appear in much younger children.

PREVIOUS

NEXT

What Is It

Risk Factors

Trichotillomania

What Is It

What to Look For

Risk Factors

Diagnosis

Treatment



Search

All+

Trichotillomania



GUIDES

Risk Factors

Girls are more likely to have trichotillomania than boys. The disorder is more common in children who have OCD, and those whose first-degree relatives have OCD. Hair pulling also tends to be a cyclical problem because hair often itches as it regrows, making children more likely to continue pulling their hair to avoid discomfort.

PREVIOUS

What to Look For

NEXT

Diagnosis



Search

All+

Trichotillomania



GUIDES

Diagnosis

Trichotillomania is diagnosed in children who have established a recurrent behavior of hair pulling that is causing them significant distress. To meet the criteria for the disorder they must have made repeated attempts to decrease or stop the behavior. Before receiving a diagnosis children are often tested for scalp infections, alopecia, or spot baldness, and any other possible medical explanation. Trichotillomania is more difficult to diagnose in very young children.



Trichotillomania



GUIDES

Treatment

Psychotherapeutic: Trichotillomania is treated primarily through behavioral therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps children become more aware of their hair pulling, is very helpful. Through CBT children can come to recognize the emotions and triggers involved in their hair pulling. Sometimes something as simple as wearing loud, dangling bracelets can make kids more self-aware.

After learning to recognize the habit, children can then begin habit reversal therapy. Some doctors recommend tricks that make hair pulling more difficult. For example, wearing bandages around the fingers and nails can make

it harder to pull out hair, as does wearing hair pulled back or under a hat. For kids who enjoy the sensation of playing with the hair after it has been pulled, rolling a paper clip or playing with a textured pencil topper can help recreate the desired sensation and keep the hands distracted. Some kids in treatment carry kits around with bandages, paper clips, hair ties and other items that will help them.

Pharmacological: Medication is usually not the first choice in treating trichotillomania, although children may be prescribed antidepressants like SSRI's while they participate in behavioral therapy.

PREVIOUS

Diagnosis

Trichotillomania

What Is It

What to Look For

Risk Factors

How can I meet other kids with "trich"?

One of the worst aspects of trich is feeling like you're the only one who has this problem. It helps to know other people dealing with trich.

The Trichotillomania Learning Center, Inc. (TLC) will provide your family with information about support groups, treatment providers and other resources in your area.

TLC publishes a quarterly newsletter, *In Touch*, filled with letters and articles by members of the growing "trich community."

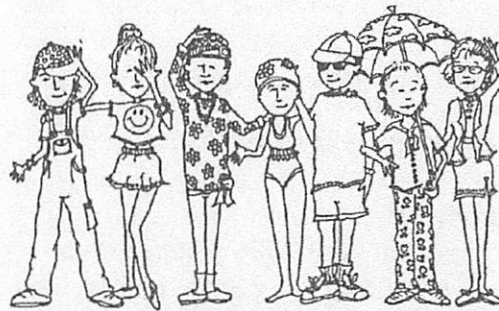
Every year, TLC holds a four-day retreat which brings together kids and adults from all over the country. This is a great opportunity to meet people with trich and talk with doctors and therapists working on treatment.

You can also start searching the Internet for bulletin boards, chat sessions and websites about trichotillomania. TLC's site is at: www.trich.org

For more information about resources and events, contact:

Trichotillomania Learning Center, Inc. (TLC)
1215 Mission Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 457-1004

Whether by phone, mail or computer, there are now lots of ways to find information and support. So get in touch!



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You pull out your hair

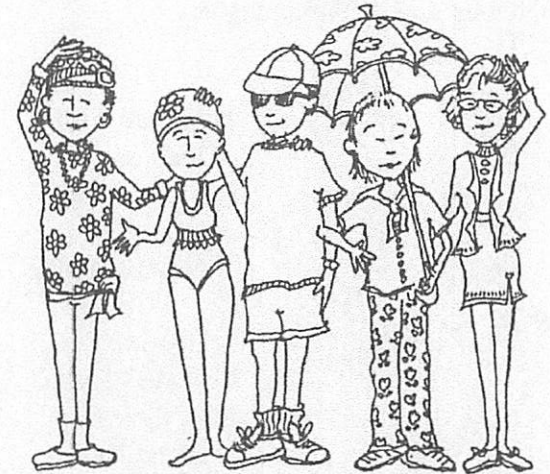
or eyelashes or eyebrows...

You've tried to stop,
and you just can't.

But you are not alone.

Millions of kids share this
problem.

It's called...



TRICHOTILLOMANIA

Pulling out your hair doesn't mean you're crazy or strange.

You and **MILLIONS** of other people have a condition called compulsive hair pulling or trichotillomania (trick-o-til-o-may-nee-ah).

If you have "trich", you feel an uncontrollable urge to pull out hairs – from your head, eyebrows, eyelashes, or any other places you have hair.

You may also play with, count or bite the hairs you pull.

People of all ages have this problem and are affected by it to different degrees.



There are a lot of kids with trich out there, but that's not always obvious.

Many people hide the results of pulling by wearing hats, make-up, or hair clips.

There may be more people with trich than we know about.

Why Me? What causes it?

Tough questions. There is no simple answer, though doctors are investigating many ideas. Some think that there may be a physical cause for hair pulling - like certain brain chemicals out of balance, for example.

Others think that pulling hair is one of many possible nervous habits - like nail biting - that can become powerful and irresistible through sheer repetition.

Right now we have more questions than answers about what causes trich. We do know it isn't your fault, or your parents' fault.

Will it go away?

Not usually by itself, but getting help from professionals who know about this problem can make a big difference. No single treatment works for everyone – so you need to experiment. Even if the urge to pull your hair never disappears completely, you may still reduce its power and gain more control.

Possible treatments to explore:

Behavior Therapy

This treatment helps train your mind and body to react differently to the pulling urge, so you can break the pulling habit, and find substitutes for the things that are satisfying about pulling out hair.

Medication

Medications can sometimes reduce the urge to pull, but may also cause side effects. The best use of medication for kids may be to treat problems such as anxiety or depression which often accompany trich. When these problems are relieved, you'll likely have more energy to devote to behavior therapy and other means of reducing hair pulling in the long term.

Support Groups/Therapy

Trichotillomania can trick you into feeling bad about yourself or losing hope. Talking with a therapist or attending a support group can help you feel happier and better able to tackle trich.

Alternative Treatments

Don't give up. Each person is different and it can take a while to discover what works best for you. Some people find that exercise, a change of diet, or hypnosis helps.

How can my parents help?

Your parents can gather information about trich through research and talking to doctors and other parents. But the most important way they can help is to learn from you.

For example, what would you like them to do when they notice you are pulling? Remind you about it nicely? Bring you a koosh ball to keep your hands busy? Or something else?

Talk with your parents about how you feel, so that you can decide how to handle trich together.