



## What is Trichotillomania?

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Have you ever met someone whose eyebrows appear to be drawn on with pencil or been curious about people who have patchy bald spots on their head? Have you observed individuals who twist hair repeatedly before pulling it out? Perhaps you know people who are obsessed with removing hair from their bodies by pulling it out with their fingers.

Trichotillomania is an impulse-control disorder that begins with increasing tension and is followed by a person's unsuccessful resistance to pulling hair out of the body. This is usually followed by feelings of relief, pleasure or gratification. The act, however, can result in noticeable hair loss and clinically significant distress or impairment in various aspects of functioning.

*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* published by the *American Psychiatric Association* states that this condition is not "better accounted for by another mental disorder and is not due to a general medical condition" such as dermatological condition.

Impulse control disorders refer to conditions where the person who suffers is unable to resist the temptation to do an act which is harmful to others or his/herself. Other impulse control disorders include compulsive gambling, kleptomania (compulsive stealing) and pyromania (compulsive fire setting).

The *Trichotillomania Learning Center* has published a Guide which credits the name of this disorder to a French dermatologist who began using it in 1889. We can divide the word into syllables to understand it better. The term "thrix" is Greek for hair and "tillein" means "to pull". Although "mania" refers to madness or frenzy, this part of the word is a misnomer as those who have the disorder are NOT "mad", "psychotic" or "crazy" as the name suggests.

Treatment for Trichotillomania can include individual or group therapy, medications, or other support through written materials and resources provided by various organizations. The OCD Centre of Los Angeles, for example, which describes hair pulling as "a conditioned response to specific situations and events" uses Cognitive-Behaviour techniques to help the client. The Centre promotes a two-fold process which involves developing awareness of the situations and events that trigger the hair pulling and then learning alternative behaviours in response to them.

If you or someone you know is suffering from trichotillomania, take heart! There are effective treatments to help you. Your first step is to set an appointment with a professional who has training and experience in this area of practice.