



SA Federation for  
Mental Health

## OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE AND RELATED DISORDERS TRICHOTILLOMANIA (HAIR-PULLING DISORDER)

### What it is:

Trichotillomania, or hair-pulling disorder, is a disorder in which an individual repeatedly and compulsively pulls his or her own hair out. Hair pulling can occur from any region of the body, such as scalp, eyebrows, face or even pubic areas. The hair pulling areas may vary over time. Hair pulling episodes can occur in brief period throughout the day, or during less frequent but lengthier episodes that can continue for hours. Such hair pulling can continue for months or years. Typically hair loss will become visible, although the individual may pull hair in a widely distributed pattern and so the hair loss may be less easy to see. They may also try to hide or disguise hair loss with makeup, scarves or wigs.

Hair pulling may also be associated with a range of behaviours associated with hair. Individuals may search for hair with a specific texture or colour to pull, may try to pull hair out in a specific way, and may examine or even eat the hair after it has been pulled out. Hair pulling does not typically take place in the presence of others, except for immediate family members. For a diagnosis of trichotillomania to be made, the hair pulling must lead to hair loss, the individual must have attempted to stop the hair pulling in the past and failed, and the hair pulling must cause impairment in functionality in areas such as work, school or social life.

### Common symptoms:

1. Recurring pulling of hair, ultimately resulting in hair loss
2. Hair pulling from various regions of the body, including scalp, eyebrows, eyelids, facial or pubic areas
3. Repeated attempts to decrease or stop hair pulling
4. The hair pulling causes impairments to the individual's ability to function at home, work or school

### Causes:

There is evidence that suggests there may be a genetic vulnerability to trichotillomania, as the disorder is more common in individuals who have a first degree relative with obsessive-compulsive disorder.