www.bfrb.org: trichotillomania . dermatillomania . onychophagia

Understanding

Body-Focused Repetitive Behaviors

Hair Pulling, Skin Picking, and Related Disorders

What is Body-Focused Repetitive Behavior?

Body-focused repetitive behavior (BFRB) is an umbrella term for a group of related disorders including hair pulling, skin picking, and nail biting. **These behaviors are not habits or tics**; rather, they are complex disorders that cause people to repeatedly touch their hair and body in ways that result in physical damage.

The best research suggests that **3% or more of the population lives with a BFRB** – that's over 10 million people in North America alone – yet they often go undiagnosed and untreated, causing shame and isolation.

Symptoms tend to begin around puberty, and may come and go over time, but usually require intervention to achieve lasting remission. Women have a greater chance of being affected than men. The causes are not fully understood, but evidence shows that these disorders are at least partly hereditary.

Common BFRBs

- **Hair pulling disorder (trichotillomania)** causes people to pull out the hair from their scalp, eyelashes, eyebrows, and other parts of the body resulting in noticeable bald patches.
- **Skin picking disorder (excoriation)** causes people to repetitively touch, rub, scratch, pick at, or dig into their skin, resulting in skin discoloration, scarring, and even severe tissue damage and disfigurement.
- **Nail biting disorder (onychophagia)** causes people to bite their nails past the nail bed and chew on cuticles until they bleed, leading to soreness and infection.
- Related behaviors include frequently chewing on the inside of the cheeks and biting the lips until they bleed.

What are the effects of BFRBs?

For some people, BFRBs are a mild problem, merely a frustration. But for many, shame about the behavior causes painful isolation and results in a great deal of emotional distress. Other complications include skin infections, repetitive motion injuries to the muscles or joints and stomach/intestinal problems, if the hair is ingested. A BFRB can lead to great tension and unhealthy dynamics within families. Parents and children alike may need help in coping with this problem.

How are BFRBs treated?

The Scientific Advisory Board of the TLC Foundation for Body-Focused Repetitive Behaviors recommends that sufferers begin by developing a solid understanding of their behavior and finding the emotional support they will need to address it. Sufferers and their health providers can then consider the psychological interventions, medications, and other therapies that have proven effective in helping people achieve remission.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Research supports certain forms of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as treatment for trichotillomania and other BFRBs. CBT is therapeutic approach focusing on the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which results in improved control over the behavior. Treatment should be tailored to the individual's needs as there is no protocol that works for every case. Visit www.bfrb.org for referrals to BFRB treatment providers.

Medication

No medication is currently approved by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) for treatment of BFRBs, though a few have proven to reduce symptoms in some individuals. Medications may also be useful in treating co-existing problems such as anxiety or depression. ***Request our booklet "Expert Consensus Treatment Guidelines" for more detailed information.***

Education and Support

Patients and their loved ones alike may benefit from the social support and motivation of participating in a support group. The foundation maintains a database of support groups around the country for people with BFRBs, and also moderates online groups for kids, teens, parents and adults. The foundation provides brochures, webinars, regional events and online content for people affected by BFRBs and their families, as well as educators, physicians, psychotherapists, and cosmetologists who may be among the first to notice a problem.

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