

Hair Loss - From Hair Twisting Habit

Definition

- A nervous habit of twisting or pulling out the hair
- The medical name for this is trichotillomania

Health Information

Symptoms

- Frequent twisting of the hair
- Broken hairs of different lengths
- The missing hair occurs in patches of different shapes. This creates bald spots.
- Often occurs on the side of the head. In right handed children, the hair loss is usually on the right side.
- Rarely, it can include plucking of the eyebrows or eyelashes.
- Can occur with nail biting, lip biting or sucking, and sore picking habits.

Cause

- In young children, it's simply a habit to comfort one's self.
- In older children, it may be more of a habit to relieve tension.
- Often occurs when the child is thinking about something else.
- Teens with hair pulling may have OCD.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Twisting the hair feels good to your child.
- They often don't know they are doing it.
- Most young children outgrow it on their own.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Distract Your Child:

- Often children twist their hair when they are bored or daydreaming.
- When you see your child doing this, try to distract them.
- Suggest they do something that will be fun
- That will usually stop the hair pulling for now.

3. Treatment for Younger Children:

- If your child is in a stubborn phase, do not comment on hair twisting. Reason: It may cause them to do it more rather than less.
- This is how normal children react when they are 2 and 3. They are expressing their independence.
- You don't want stopping the hair twisting to become a control battle. Reason: You will always lose because it's a rule you can't enforce.
- Caution: Never punish your child for hair pulling.

4. **Treatment for Older Children:**

- This advice is for school age children
- Offer them a substitute or competing habit.
- An example is playing finger games. Pulling at a wool pad or squeezing an exercise ball are other options.
- Caution: Never punish your child for hair pulling.

5. **Remove Triggers:**

- Whenever your child has a flurry of hair twisting, try to find the cause.
- Then try to remove or reduce that trigger.
- Also, try to lessen any pressure your child may be under at that time.
- Reason: Playing with the hair is used to reduce stress.

6. **Relaxation:**

- Help your child relax in general.
- Make sure your child has free time and fun time each day.
- If your child has too many activities, try to lighten the schedule.

7. **What to Expect:**

- Young children (age 4 to 10) with hair pulling usually get over it within 3 to 6 months.
- Teens with hair pulling may need referral to a mental health expert for counseling.
- Website for parents: www.trich.org

Call Your Doctor If

- It lasts more than 6 months
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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