



Treating Compulsive Skin Picking by Peter Field

Compulsive skin picking (CSP), or dermatillomania to give it its medical name, can affect anyone at any time.

What may well begin as an apparently innocent activity - an attempt to remove and deal with small skin imperfections and irregularities - can all too soon turn into a compulsion that leaves the individual feeling powerless and confused.

The person who picks compulsively at their skin can spend extended periods of time engaged in this activity and this can have negative consequences for his or her work and social relationships.

In extreme case, this chronic and often poorly understood condition can reach such serious proportions that severe skin damage and actual disfigurement can occur.

Usually, the person suffering from this compulsive disorder repeatedly scratches, picks, rubs or digs their nails into the skin. Often this behaviour can be triggered by stress and underlying emotional difficulties such as anxiety, fear or simply boredom.

Modern thinking on CSP or dermatillomania is that it belongs to a group of disorders known as Body Focused Repetitive Behaviours or BFRBs. Other conditions belonging to this group are such things as chronic nail biting and compulsive hair pulling.

It is important that anyone experiencing continued compulsions to pick at the skin first consult a medical doctor in order to eliminate any possible underlying medical condition.

This is necessary in order to determine that the skin picking is a separate and independent issue and not a symptom of another disorder such as an autoimmune problem, developmental problem or psychosis.

Many people find that they begin to pick at their skin during a stressful period in their lives.

Through repetition, the individual learns that by picking at their skin they can control or at least distract themselves from difficult feelings. And so the skin picking becomes a habit.

Others may have started picking at skin following some kind of skin disease or injury. As the wound to the skin begins to heal a scab forms which can feel itchy. This may provoke the individual to scratch or pick which in turn prevents the wound from healing completely. And this in turn leads on to even more itching and picking as further scabbing occurs.

The medical response to chronic skin picking, dermatillomania, is often to prescribe one of the Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) such as Prozac. This approach has had limited success, but works only at the actual symptom level. It does absolutely nothing about the underlying causes or drivers.

Other approaches include cognitive behavioral therapy, including Habit Reversal Training (HRT) which aims at identifying triggers and teaching the individual coping strategies. This approach has also had some success, but again, it focuses on managing the actual symptoms, rather than dealing with the real underlying drivers and cause.

In the opinion of this therapist, a much more comprehensive and effective approach is to uncover the actual cause of the skin picking through the use of skillfully applied advanced hypnotherapy techniques.

The skin picking activity is obviously being driven by a subconscious urge and so it is to the subconscious mind that we need to turn in order to bring about a solution to this harmful behaviour.

Once the underlying reasons and drivers for the dermatillomania have been uncovered, the subconscious mind can be helped to 're-programme' itself and the skin picking simply becomes extinct or replaced with a more helpful anxiety or stress release strategy.

If you or someone you care about suffers from compulsive skin picking, picking at skin or dermatillomania, and you really do want to stop skin picking, do not despair, help is available.

With modern advanced hypnotherapy you can end compulsive skin picking, regain control and live your life free of this debilitating habit.

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