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## What is...



There are numerous disorders which plague millions of Americans every day, but do you really know exactly what some of these disorders are? In this edition of our Advantage EAP newsletter, we will discuss some common disorders and phobias, which you may have always wondered exactly what they are.

### Cutting<sup>1</sup>

Cutting is a self injuring disorder in which one makes scratches or cuts on their body with a sharp object. The cut is enough to break the skin and make the person bleed. People who cut usually start in their young teens, and some continue to cut into adulthood.

Cutting is typically done on the wrists, arms, legs or bellies. People who cut will often hide their cutting so no one else finds out. People may also burn themselves instead of cutting, which ultimately cries out for the same help.

People cut themselves to try to cope with unbearable pain of intense emotions, pressure, or distressing relationship issues. People may also cut to express strong feelings of helplessness, rejection, extreme sadness, or even anger.

If you notice a person cutting, you need to assist them in seeking the help of a mental professional. Tell them that there are ways to cope with the difficult situation they may be in, or help in dealing with their emotional pain.

### Trichotillomania<sup>2</sup>

Trichotillomania is a type of mental illness where people have an "irresistible urge to pull out their hair, whether it's from their scalp, their eyebrows, or other areas of their body." While for most, hair-pulling is intentional and focused, some may become so ritualized with the pulling that they may not realize that they are doing it.

While researchers are still trying to understand a specific cause of "hair-

pulling”, some other different causes may include:

- Genes- Some researchers believe that gene mutation may cause neurons in the brain to trigger defective connections, which result in the urge to pull one’s hair out.
- Neurochemical problems- Other research has shown that serotonin and dopamine imbalances in the brain may play a role in “hair-pulling”.

“Some symptoms of trichotillomania may include”:

- Patchy bald areas on the scalp or other areas of the body
- Sparse or missing eyelashes or eyebrows
- Chewing or eating pulled out hair
- Playing with pulled-out hair
- Rubbing pulled-out hair across the lips or face

This impulse control disorder can be helped with behavior therapy, in which the person gains awareness about their habits, and also learn techniques in which to avoid pulling.

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## Phobias<sup>3</sup> ...



A phobia is an unrelenting fear of a situation, place, or object, which is unwarranted, and usually harmless. With the fear comes a desire to avoid the situation or object and may cause a failure to function normally.

Phobias are the most common disorder in the United States, being that more than 12% of the population experiences a phobia at some point in their life.

### **Agoraphobia<sup>4</sup>**

Agoraphobia is an anxiety about being in places or situations that may be difficult to escape from, or in which help may not be available if an event like a panic attack may result.

People who experience agoraphobia may avoid situations in which anxiety or fear may result. Persons plagued with agoraphobia often will not like to be alone if faced in a distressing situation.

People with agoraphobia typically avoid situations that include:

- Being outside the home alone
- Being in a crowd
- Traveling in a plane, train, or automobile
- Being on a long bridge

Treatment is critical for persons suffering from attacks, such as ones mentioned above.

### **Social Phobia<sup>5</sup>**

Social Phobia is different from Agoraphobia in that social phobia is characterized by an overwhelming anxiety and extreme self-consciousness in

## Contact Us

Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30-5:00pm. Evening hours are available on a limited basis.

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everyday social situations. Social phobia may be limited to just one situation, such as eating in front of others, or it may be so extreme that people experience anxiety and fear in any social situation.

Persons experiencing social phobia, experience intense and chronic fear of being judged or watched by others, resulting in embarrassment or humiliation by their actions. There are many physical symptoms that go with social phobia, such as intense blushing, excessive sweating, nausea, difficulty talking, and trembling. Social phobia may be so intense that daily work is interfered and unable to be carried out.

People who experience the signs or symptoms of social phobias should talk to a local therapist, who can help them lead a productive and fulfilling life, and help to deal with the anxiety and fear that accompanies social phobia.

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### References:

- 1) "Cutting," [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/mental\\_health/cutting.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/mental_health/cutting.html)
  - 2) "Trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder)," <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/trichotillomania/DS00895>
  - 3) "Phobias," <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/phobias/DS00272>
  - 4) "Agoraphobia-Symptoms," <http://psychcentral.com/disorders/sx29.htm>
  - 5) "Social Phobia (Social Anxiety Disorder)," <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/social-phobia/index.shtml>
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