

Gene tied to hair pulling disorder

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A Durham, N.C., study has suggested mutations in a certain gene might be related to a disorder that causes people to pull out their own hair.

Researchers at the Duke Center for Human Genetics said mutations in the SLITKR1 gene may play a role in trichotillomania, a mental disorder that causes sufferers to compulsively pull their hair out, WebMD reported Thursday.

"Society still holds negative perceptions about psychiatric conditions such as trichotillomania. But, if we can show they have a genetic origin, we can improve diagnosis, develop new therapies, and reduce the stereotypes associated with mental illness," said researcher Stephan Zuchner.

The researchers focused on the SLITRK1 gene, which has been linked to Tourette syndrome, a related impulse-control disorder, while examining the cases of 44 families containing one or more trichotillomania sufferers.

The team said it is likely that other genes also contribute to the disorder.

"The SLITRK1 gene could be among many other genes that are likely (to) interact with each other and environmental factors to trigger trichotillomania and other psychiatric conditions," said researcher Allison Ashley-Koch.

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