

## 5 Misconceptions Around Dermatillomania

Through its work since its creation in 2016, Lauren McKeaney and the Picking Me Foundation has devoted its efforts to normalizing Dermatillomania as well as advocating for people who suffer from it. But there's a lot of work left to be done as several misconceptions continue to exist around this highly misunderstood condition.

### 1. Skin Picking is a reaction to a person being on illicit drugs.

*TRUTH: This will test your reading comprehension skills.*

Yes, self-harm through Skin Picking and/or Hair Pulling is a common reaction to the physical and psychological effects of drugs such as methamphetamines, cocaine, and heroin. However just because a person picks at their skin, that doesn't mean they use illicit drugs. That is the root of this misconception as those with Dermatillomania often get accused of being drug addicts. It has happened to Lauren many times. "Even before I knew what meth was, I was accused of using it."

### 2. Skin Picking is a form of self-harm.

*TRUTH: There's a major distinction between the two that most people don't know about.*

"Self-harm, the goal is to feel pain and Dermatillomania the goal is accomplishment," Lauren said. "If the scab feels foreign like it shouldn't be there it's more about you fixed that perceived imperfection. If I'm coming from a standpoint of self-harm, it's more to feel that feeling to cause harm and cause that pain."

### 3. You have bad acne.

*TRUTH: Many Dermatologists prescribe every acne clearing solution under the sun to help out Dermatillomania sufferers. They rarely ever work.*

"The tendency is to assume that there was acne there and that was what was being picked which is wrong," Lauren said. Rather, Dermatillomania sufferers pick at scabs, scars, birthmarks, freckles, hair follicles in addition to pimples. Sometimes they pick at a perceived imperfection on their skin that isn't even there. You don't need to have acne to have Dermatillomania, and the two words definitely aren't interchangeable.

### 4. It's only happening because you are anxious.

*TRUTH: Let's have Lauren take this one.*

"It [Dermatillomania] stems from a place of stimulus control from an impulse disorder," Lauren said. "You can be feeling super up and super anxious and nervous and your fingers will look to wander and look for a way to regulate the stimulus and self sooth. But you could also be driving in your car, totally calm, complacent, zoned out if you will and [you will get] that same feeling from that low spot of your hands moving and looking for a way to up that stimuli."

### 5. This illness isn't life pervasive.

*TRUTH: Battling the urge to pick your skin is a 24/7; 365-day battle for Dermatillomania sufferers. Both the physical and mental effects of the disorder impact quality of life.*

On the physical side of things, Dermatillomania sufferers risk tissue damage, infections, blood loss, iron deficiency, scarring, sores, pulled tendons, and bruises because of their mental illness. Lauren almost lost her leg to the life-threatening bacteria MRSA due to her excessive skin picking. Equally compromising is the mental toll Dermatillomania takes on sufferers which can include anxiety, shame, and negative self-concept among others. To say that Dermatillomania isn't life pervasive is to discredit its severity which is disrespectful to sufferers.

## Lesser Known Effects of Dermatillomania

*In case you needed evidence that Dermatillomania is a serious, life-pervasive condition check out this list of the lesser known costs of having Dermatillomania. People experience Dermatillomania in differently ways, and a person can still have Dermatillomania without experiencing any of the effects mentioned below.*

### **Skin Infections:**

A wound that comes about as a result of picking can become infected and lead to more severe health conditions down the line such as staph infections contraction of dangerous bacteria or fungi, rashes, painful blisters, sepsis, general sickness, etc.

### **Pulled Tendons/Pinched Nerves/ Arthritis/Carpal Tunnel:**

Dermatillomania can cause damage to the finger muscles. Just ask CEO Lauren McKeane, "I have pinched nerves in my fingers, largely around my knuckles [because of my picking], I didn't really realize I had been pushing them in ways they weren't meant to go and doing it for extended periods of time over and over again."

### **Muscle Fatigue:**

This is a symptom that you wouldn't readily associate with Dermatillomania, yet muscle fatigue is an all too real occurrence for many skin-picking sufferers. "In episodes where I've been stuck in a mirror for hours hunched over a countertop, I will often not feel the pain my elbows are experiencing as they are developing a bruise until my back gives out," McKeane said.

### **Abscesses:**

According to webmd.com, an abscess is an inflamed, tender, pus-filled mass generally surrounded by a pink to deep red colored area that is painful to the touch. It looks like an infected white-head pimple. An abscess can rupture and/or spread to skin tissue or into the bloodstream causing sickness.

### **Sleep Loss:**

Skin Picking time cuts into sleep time leaving sufferers feeling sleep deprived and drained of energy. As a result, performance at work and in everyday activities regresses causing an overall reduction in quality of life.

### **Iron Deficiency:**

Known as anemia in medical circles, iron deficiency can come about as a result of losing iron-rich blood through picking. Anemia leads to dizziness, full-body fatigue, paleness, cold body temperature or chills, and lightheadedness.

### **MRSA:**

Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium that causes infection throughout the body. This strain of bacterium has developed resistance to many common antibiotics and is therefore very dangerous."

### **Tissue Damage:**

A major distinction between casual skin picking and Dermatillomania is the latter causes tissue damage. Most people don't realize that sometimes tissue damage is so severe that sufferers can't grow hair on damaged areas of their bodies anymore.

### **Cellulitis:**

A potentially life-threatening bacterial infection characterized by swollen and red areas of the skin that feel warm and tender to the touch. It usually originates in the lower limbs.