

SKIN CARE



Skin Picking:

It's More Serious Than You Think

by Marissa Hicken

Whether it's because of a blackhead, callus or a scab, most of us are guilty of picking at our skin every once and a while. For many, it's hard to stop and they find themselves repeatedly touching, rubbing, scratching, picking at, or digging into their skin—a condition known as chronic skin picking (CSP).

The actual cause of CSP is unknown but it can be attributed to a variety of factors. "While some people begin this behavior only after an injury or disease of the skin, others may view it as an emotional outlet, with the behavior spiking in instances of anger or frustration. In either case, the result can lead to scarring of the skin – the epidermis and/or dermis, noticeable tissue damage and in some cases infection can occur at the site," says New York dermatologist and contributing dermatologist for Algenist skin care Jody Levine, MD.

"Over time, if this behavior is repeated on the same patch of skin, the area can often experience discoloration and thickening," says Dr. Levine. Scars can form as well, leaving the skin with an uneven skin texture that may be permanent.

It's important to distinguish the difference between this disorder and the occasional skin picking that most people experience. Seek help if you're experiencing one of more of these common characteristics of CSP:

- Inability to resist urges to pick at real or perceived blemishes in the skin
- Mounting tension before picking
- Gratification and relaxation while picking
- Noticeable sores or scarring on the skin
- Increased distress and/or interference with daily life