

Skin Stresses: Specialist Matt Traube Explains Anxiety's Impacts on the Skin

by sarah557
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Matt Traube, MFT is a licensed child and adult psychotherapist who specializes in psychological aspects of skin conditions, anxiety and phobias, teenage and young adult issues, and the psychological impact of undiagnosed conditions. He is the author of the psychologytoday.com blog "Healthy Mind, Healthy Skin," and his work has been featured in multiple magazines and psychological websites. Read his original article, "Anxiety and the Skin," [here](#) and check out his [website](#) to learn more!

To begin, how did you decide to pursue the study and treatment of the psychological aspects of skin conditions as a career? What motivates you?

"My interest in treating people who experience psychological aspects of skin conditions stems from my father, Dr. Ted Grossbart. He was a pioneer in the field of psycho-dermatology and incredibly gifted therapist. I am always amazed at how many people around the world have benefitted from reading his book, *Skin Deep*. Many of the conditions I work with are challenging to treat. Anytime I can help someone make an improvement, it is very rewarding as a therapist."

Read *Skin Deep* [here](#). It's free!

You state in your article, "Anxiety and Your Skin," that "when we no longer feel safe or in control, the skin can respond." Can you explain the connection between anxiety, adrenaline, and skin problems?

"Feeling unsafe, stressed or anxious can trigger the central nervous system. Numerous skin conditions are influenced by the activation of the central nervous system. This is thought to be, at least in some conditions, a result of an inflammatory stress response that can occur."

In your practice, have you found that the treatment of anxiety is correlated with an increase in overall health of the skin?

"I am not sure if learning how to manage anxiety is correlated with an increase of overall health of the skin, but I do believe certain skin conditions are exacerbated by increased anxiety and stress. It is not uncommon for me to hear that someone's acne, eczema, rosacea, psoriasis, or skin picking increased during a particularly anxious time."

It has been found that the existence skin problems trigger more anxiety in some individuals, thus creating a snowball effect of ever-increasing anxiety and worsening skin. What would you suggest as the best way for people to extract themselves from this negative cycle, decrease anxiety, and enjoy better skin?

"I think it is helpful to determine if personality characteristics exacerbate the skin issue or if the skin issues are exacerbating the personality traits. People suffering from skin conditions often feel like others trivialize the problem. This results in hiding the significant amount of emotional pain they experience. In many cases, the first step is increasing awareness. Over time, we all fall into patterns and can gradually lose sight of how our feelings morphed into facts. For instance, if we become convinced we are unlovable because of our skin condition, anxiety and depression are common results. When we increase our awareness and learn that in fact, many people with a variety of skin conditions are deeply loved by others, we can begin to change our relationship with our skin condition and decrease our anxious feelings."

You specialize in the psychological aspects of skin conditions, such as skin picking and hair pulling, and you are affiliated with the Trichotillomania Learning Center. What advice can you give our readers who suffer from anxiety as well as Body-Focused Repetitive Behaviors such as these?

"Many body-focused repetitive behaviors such as skin or hair pulling can be increased by anxiety. When we feel anxious, we try to find salvation in what feels normal. If you grew up eating when you felt anxious, as an adult, you may find yourself reaching for food to cope with your anxiety. If skin picking or hair pulling has been a common behavior for many years, increasing the behavior during anxious moments can help regulate the uncomfortable feelings. I see these coping mechanisms as both behavioral and emotional. We want to address the actual behavior as well as the underlying feelings that can be exacerbating the behavior."

In your opinion, what is the best form of therapy to treat both anxiety and skin issues? Are there any up-and-coming or under-used treatment methods that you've found work well?

"Treating anxiety and skin issues require different approaches. With anxiety, the biggest improvements come from learning how to safely address the specific anxiety that someone is experiencing. A big piece of the work is actually learning how to face the anxiety provoking situation and re-training the brain to respond appropriately. Skin issues can respond to several psychological approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy, hypnosis, and guided imagery."

In your practice, you treat and work closely with a lot of Millennials. Why is it important that this generation educate themselves on the link between anxiety and the skin?

"Millennials face a subset of issues previous generations did not have to face. With the arrival of social media, skin seems to be more influential than ever. The unrealistic pressure to have flawless skin can cause challenging mental health issues. Learning how to manage anxiety and perfectionism will hugely help heal many psychological aspects of conditions."

Thank you Matt Traube for giving this interview! Definitely check out his blog and website for more!