

## TRICHOTILLOMANIA WITH LATE RECURRENCE IN CAT

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### Abstract

Trichotillomania (TTM) is most frequently characterized by small bald spots on the posterior part of the body of dogs and cats. The disease arises on a psychogenic basis and is a consequence of distress: the animal deprives itself of hair and brings about skin lesions by intensively licking its body. It has been relatively rarely described in cats and, in the case discussed here, is unique in view of the described recurrence. This study presents TTM occurring in a female cat in the second month of life with a recurrence after four years.

## TRICHOTILLOMANIA Z PÓŹNYM NAWROTEM U KOTA

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Słowa kluczowe: kot, trichotillomania nawracająca.

### Abstrakt

Trichotillomania (TTM) charakteryzuje się najczęściej drobnymi ogniskami łysienia w tylnej okolicy ciała psów i kotów. Powstaje na tle psychogennym, jest następstwem dystresu – zwierzę intensywnie wylizując się, pozbawia się włosów i doprowadza do zmian w skórze. U kotów jest stosunkowo mało opisywana, a prezentowany przypadek jest unikalny w związku z przedstawionym nawrotem. Opisano TTM występującą u kotki w drugim miesiącu jej życia i nawrót po 4 latach.

## **Introduction**

Trichotillomania (TTM) – is a term indicating hair removal by a given specimen (from Greek tricho – hair, and till – to pull). It is also referred to as psychogenic baldness (WOLTAN 1986). It occurs in humans and in animals (ANZIETA et al. 2008, MORALS et al. 2010, SEHGAL, SRIVASTAVA 2006, WILLEMSE et al. 1989). In dogs, it is most often characterized by small bald spots in the lumbosacral area, the abdominal surface of the body or the medial part of the thighs (WILKINSON, HARVEY 1996). It also accompanies inflammation of the distal parts of the limbs. In cats, the aforementioned disease can be preceded by a primary condition, such as e.g. atopic dermatitis, atopy or food intolerance (DODMAN 1994). TTM can also result in formation of trichobezoars in the gastrointestinal system (ANZIETA et al. 2008, MORALS et al. 2010, SEHGAL, SRIVASTAVA 2006).

Idiopathic appearance of this psychodermatosis occurs more frequently in cats of oriental breeds. According to WILLEMSE et al. (1989), European short-haired cats can also suffer from this disease. The appearance of pathological changes is related to the distress caused by a new child in the family, a change of furniture or carpets, a threat to its own territory caused by a new cat or even a change in the food bowl location, as well as many other reasons that are difficult to ascertain. The animal escapes to a safe place, where it “rechannels” the tension, i.e. provides an outlet for its frustration by licking a “selected” part of the body. Sometimes it does it only in hiding, so its carers believe that the animal is not licking the pathologically changed skin area.

## **Case report**

A crossbred female cat was found in the street as a four-week-old homeless animal. From the first moments of staying with new owners, it showed deviations from the standard behaviour. The cat demonstrated increased reactivity, anxiety and excessive distrust towards new carers, who were experienced breeders. Frequently, as a result of fear, excessive jumping was observed, similar to the behaviour depicted in animated cartoons.

A gentle approach and attempts to win the trust of the cat were impeded by the presence of two dogs within the boundaries of the property – a boxer and a female dachshund, the latter revealing a particularly hostile attitude towards cats. In spite of these difficulties, the process of the cat’s adaptation to the new environment proceeded relatively quickly and normally over the following weeks. The cat grew and developed well and was fed pursuant to formulas provided for young, growing kittens of its age.

At the end of its second month of life, the cat was bitten by a dog – a 3 cm x 1.5 cm bite wound was noticed in its lumbosacral area. The treatment of this wound, carried out for about six days, resulted in its complete healing. However, about two weeks later, excoriations appeared in the same area, followed by increasing bald spots (Figure 1). No parasites or primary or secondary lesions were found on the skin. The hair cover, apart from the discussed area, was normal, sleek and soft, and the skin did not bear any noticeable lesions.

The therapeutic approach consisted of the oral administration of sedatives (Relanimal (Diazepam) in a dose of 3 mg/kg b.m. – i.e. the lowest dose recommended by the manufacturer), along with vitamin and mineral preparations and resolving stressful situations in a controlled manner, pursuant to the general principles for treating neuroses (FONBERG 1971).

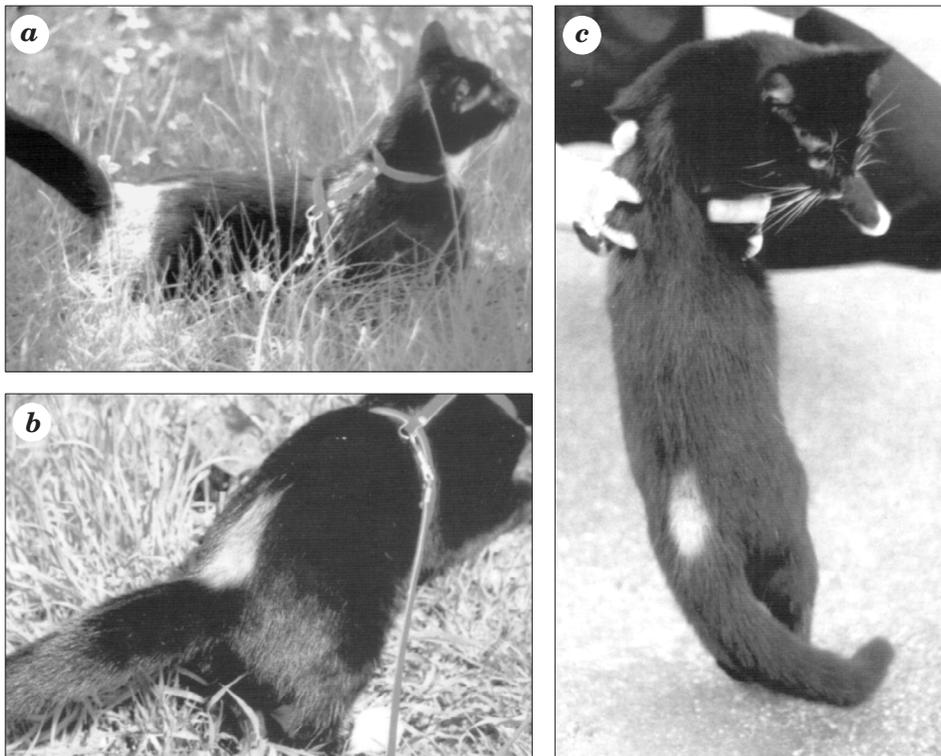


Fig. 1. The cat with skin lesions in the lumbosacral area, as a consequence of TTM: *a* – two weeks after being bitten by a dog; *b* – four weeks after getting bitten by a dog, ten days after applying the TTM – oriented treatment; *c* – six weeks after applying the TTM – oriented treatment

In that period, after some successful escapes, the cat calmly passed the dogs at a distance it considered as safe. The anxiety intensified when the animal was carried by its carers on their arms, which, as it seems, was associated with the fact that it had been attacked by the above-mentioned dachshund in such circumstances several times before. The anxiety was also caused by a noise, e.g. the “clicking” of a camera. However, the recovery continued at a good rate. At about the sixth month of life, the cat had its first oestrus cycle, with inhibited symptoms and a shortened course, which is of importance for distinguishing the TTM discussed here with baldness-related hormonal disorders which can occur at this stage.

The described TTM-related situation recurred about four years later (Figure 2), the new stimulus being the birth of the first child in the family,



Fig. 2. TTM recurrence in a 4-year old cat – skin lesions in the lumbosacral area in the third week of the recurrence

towards which the previously castrated cat approached with distrustful interest. In this case, the previously-described therapeutic approach was extended and brought about noticeable results only at the end of the fourth week after the beginning of the treatment. The treatment involved the application of Acepromazine in a dose of about 1 mg/kg of body mass once a day, in the evening. To date, the cat has displayed limited trust, although no hostile intent, towards the child.

The case of TTM described here, with the recurrence of symptoms after about four years, is the first study in the Polish literature concerning this subject and demonstrates how strong the process of “imprinting” habits in the early stage of life can be and how difficult it is to “recondition” created behavioural stereotypes. Nevertheless, a proper approach before the animal reaches maturity makes it possible to mitigate the effects of a pathological stereotype of behaviour and subsequently, facilitates proper relations with the carers.

It should be also emphasized that in the case of a similar disease occurring in humans, which is definitely psychological in origin, it suggests a similar approach to take in relation to cats suffering from TTM.

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