



**My poor  
barnet's  
been  
through the lot!**

By Neomie Da Costa,  
46, from Bournemouth

I stared in the mirror, combed through my dark hair. *Looking good, I grinned. Sounds vain, I know. But actually, I couldn't be less arrogant if I tried.*

For the last 20 years, even my reflection in shop windows used to make me run a mile.

You see, most of my life, I'd suffered trichotillomania – an uncontrollable urge to pull out your own hair.

*When most people get stressed, they'll shout or cry, but I'd yank out my locks.*

It started when I was just 11.

My parents were arguing, and I hated it.

One day, I was so upset, I literally pulled my hair out.

*At first, it hurt – then came a rush of relief.*

And from then on, if I was down, I'd tug away.

It was just a few strands at first. So no-one really noticed.

*Then when I was 19, my dad died of cancer.*

Devastated, I reacted by clinging to the first man I met and falling pregnant.

But then he left me, too.

So there I was – a grieving, heartbroken single mum...

*But I know how to cope, I*



**My daughter Jaya kept me strong**

*told myself, yanking and tugging.*

I did try to stop when I had my daughter Jaya, in summer 1982.

But I was addicted – and by the age of 25, I was almost bald.

Wigs and hats concealed the worst.

Then in 1996, I discovered the Internet and nervously typed in: *pulling hair out.*

**PING!**  
*Trichotillomania.*

I had a proper medical condition... I was ill.

*I pull out my eyelashes, another sufferer admitted.*

Suddenly, realising I wasn't alone, I found a new strength.

*I can beat this, I thought.*

And with Jaya and my Internet friends, I did finally manage to stop pulling my hair.

At 35, for the first time ever, I

# To hair Hell and back

could look in the mirror and not cry.

I started going out more, and my confidence shot up.

*At last, my life had finally begun.*

But my story doesn't end there...

On 20 March 2008, two days before my 45th birthday, I found a lump on my right breast.

'Cancer,' the doctor said.

'You'll need chemo and radiotherapy,' he told me.

*I knew what that meant – I'd get sick... and lose my hair...*

I'd spent all my life pulling my locks out.

Now I'd grown my hair back, I'd lose it all again anyway.

*The bitter irony.*

And those months of treatment were a nightmare. Seeing clumps of hair falling out everywhere I went.

'Maybe I deserve it?' I sobbed. 'Maybe it's karma?'

But no, I'd just been painfully unlucky.

Still, Jaya kept me positive.

'We'll get

through this together, Mum,' she promised.

And she was right. Last October, my treatment was over.

'You're in remission,' the doctor smiled.

After a while, my mane began to grow back. It's still not perfect, and I wear wigs, like in the photo above, but I've never appreciated my hair so much.

Even if one strand comes out in the hairbrush now, I get upset.

There's no way I'll go back to my hair-pulling ways.

*Hair today.*

*But definitely not gone tomorrow!*



**During chemo**

**SAVE £10 ON A YEAR OF Chat!**  
**SUBSCRIBE TODAY**  
 Call 0845 123 1231 and quote 21E  
 Or go online to [www.chatsubs.co.uk/IATAM](http://www.chatsubs.co.uk/IATAM)

As told to Neil Stavely/Rebecca Rampling. Photos: BNPS