
Alice,

In the past I have self-mutilated and recently there has been a lot of added stress to my life. I've heard about wearing a rubber band on your wrist as an alternative. I was just curious are there any downsides to this method, as an example I have been doing this for a week now and I have gotten a bruise on my hand, it probably isn't from me snapping the rubber band but I was just wondering if there is anything I should know about this method? Thanks

Answer

Dear Reader,

It’s impressive that you recognized that stress in your life may be negatively affecting your behavior, and you asked for help. Inflicting pain on yourself, including self-mutilating or "cutting" is a form of self-injury. This is a serious issue and may lead to more dangerous behaviors. These behaviors may become addictive over time and may be very difficult to stop.

Although snapping a rubber band may feel like a safer alternative to cutting, it is still considered a form of self-injury and may be a sign that the emotions or stressors contributing to your desire to hurt yourself are still bothering you. Over time, snapping a rubber band can lead to the redness and bruising on your skin that you describe.

Resisting the urge to self-injure may involve finding ways to deal with the emotions behind the act and the triggers that lead to self-injuring. You mention that you are feeling stressed lately—are you also feeling angry? Depressed? Depending on your emotions there are things you can try to help you cope with the urge to injure without hurting yourself:

- If you feel angry try getting your emotions out by punching a pillow, releasing some energy out through exercise or dance, or ripping some paper. See Anger management [2] for other ways to deal with anger.
- If you feel numb and cutting is a way to feel something, try other ways to stimulate your senses? eat something spicy, hold an ice cube against your skin (briefly), or take a hot shower. Snapping a rubber band is also a way to feel something, although keep in mind that this is still inflicting pain and possibly causing your bruising.
- If you need to calm down, try taking a bath, going for a walk, listening to music that soothes you, or meditating. Check out Meditation [3] to learn how to meditate.
- If you cut because you want to see blood, try the methods mentioned above or try drawing a red line where you might normally cut yourself.
Another method to try to stop self-injuring is using the "15 minute rule." If you feel the urge to injure yourself, wait 15 minutes. During that time try other methods to alleviate the urge, or try to talk with someone you trust about your feelings. If you make it through 15 minutes without self-injuring congratulate yourself! You just proved that you have the power to overcome those feelings. If after the first 15 minutes you still feel like hurting yourself, try another 15 minutes. The 15 minute rule can be a good coping strategy, but if at any time you think you can't make it be sure to find someone to talk to or be with for support until the urge subsides.

It was brave of you to reach out and write, but it is equally important that you find a mental health care provider to talk with about why you feel the urge to self-injure. The Mental Health America website has additional resources on finding counseling services throughout the country. Talking with a counselor may be difficult at first, but expressing your emotions and talking about how to deal with stress in a more positive way may help you avoid self-injuring in the future.

Best of luck as you work towards healthy stress management,

Alice!

Category:
Emotional Health
Obsessive & Compulsive Behavior

Related questions
Stressed-out teen with suicidal thoughts
Self-mutilation
Self-injury

Resources
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
Mental Health Service (CUMC)

Published date:
Nov 02, 2007
Last reviewed on:
Mar 31, 2014