

Alopecia Areata; Overview & Treatment

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Key points

- Alopecia is the loss of hair when immunity attacks hair follicles
- People who already have an autoimmune disease have a higher chance of getting alopecia
- Three main types of alopecia areata
- The most common treatment of alopecia is the use of corticosteroids

Alopecia areata is a disease that happens when the immune system attacks hair follicles and causes hair loss. Hair follicles are the structures in skin that form hair. While hair can be lost from any part of the body, alopecia areata usually affects the head and face. Hair typically falls out in small, round patches about the size of a quarter, but in some cases, hair loss is more extensive. Most people with the disease are healthy and have no other symptoms.

Some people experience only one episode while other have it throughout life. Recovery is unpredictable too, with hair re-growing fully in some people but not in others.¹

There is no cure for alopecia areata, but there are treatments that help hair grow back more quickly. There are also resources to help people cope with hair loss.

Who gets Alopecia Areata?

Anyone can have alopecia areata. Men and women get it equally, it is also not racial group specific. People usually get it in their between the teens and thirties. When children younger than 10 get it, it is usually progressive. People who already have an autoimmune disease such as arthritis as well as people with allergies have a higher chance of getting alopecia areata. Emotional stresses have also been seen as possible triggers.²

Types

There are three main types of alopecia areata:

- Patchy alopecia areata: the most common type in which hair loss happens in one or more coin-sized patches on the scalp or other parts of the body.
- Alopecia totalis: People with this type lose all or nearly all of the hair on their scalp.
- Alopecia universalis: In this type, which is rare, there is a complete or nearly complete loss of hair on the scalp, face, and rest of the body.

Treatment

There is currently no cure for alopecia areata, although

there are some forms of treatment that can be suggested by doctors to help hair re-grow more quickly.³

The most common form of alopecia areata treatment is the use of corticosteroids, powerful anti-inflammatory drugs that can suppress the immune system. These are mostly commonly administered through local injections, topical ointment application, or orally.

An anti-inflammatory diet containing omega 3 fatty acids and leafy greens, and avoiding inflammatory foods such as sugar and processed foods have been proven to show promising results in many people suffering from alopecia areata.⁴

References

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