

ALOPECIA AREATA



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Sudden hair loss in circular patches on the scalp. The hair loss is not accompanied by other visible evidence of scalp disease. It can involve hair on the scalp, eyebrows, eyelashes, genital area, underarms (sometimes).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sudden hair loss in sharply defined circular patches. In rare cases, body hair loss may be total (alopecia universalis).
- No pain.
- No itch.

CAUSES

- Unknown, but heredity and emotional factors, such as anxiety, may contribute to hair loss. The autoimmune system (misdirected immune response in which the body's defenses become self-destructive) may also be involved.
- Occasionally due to thyroiditis or pernicious anemia.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress.
- Family history of alopecia areata.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable, with spontaneous new growth, in 18 months to 3 years. Persons with a few small patches are generally cured completely. The disorder recurs in 25% of cases.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Loss of all hair.
- Slow or incomplete regrowth.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Consider wearing a hairpiece or wig during the acute phase.
- In a simple, self-limited case where the alopecia is not noticeable, no treatment may be necessary.
- Continue to bathe and shampoo as usual. The disorder is not contagious.
- Don't tug on normal hair close to areas of hair loss.
- Additional information available from the National Alopecia Areata Foundation, 714 C Street, Suite 216, San Rafael, CA 94901, (415) 456-4644.

MEDICATIONS

- Topical steroids may be prescribed. Apply topical steroid once or twice a day unless directed otherwise. Apply immediately after bathing or shampooing for better spreading and penetration. For scalp and groin, use only low-potency steroid products without fluorine. In special cases, you may have injections of steroids into affected areas and be prescribed oral cortisone drugs to take on alternate days.
- Topical minoxidil (a drug used for hair growth) may help. However, it is expensive and its effectiveness is highly variable.
- Injections of triamcinolone into the scalp may be used for some patients.
- Photochemotherapy with PUVA may be recommended. This treatment combines the use of a drug that sensitizes the skin along with a controlled dose of ultraviolet light.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of alopecia areata.
- The following occurs during treatment:
 - Hair loss increases.
 - Hair loss doesn't diminish in 4 weeks.
 - Areas show signs of infection (redness, swelling, tenderness, warmth) after injections.