



Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata (AA) is a condition in which hair is lost from some or all areas of the body, usually from the scalp. Because it causes bald spots on the scalp, especially in the first stages, it is sometimes called spot baldness. It progresses very rapidly, and it can happen in childhood as well as in adult men and women, but usually at an earlier age. In 1–2% of cases, the condition can spread to the entire scalp (alopecia totalis) or to the entire epidermis (alopecia universalis).

The types of Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata can be divided into the following types:

1. **Alopecia areata monocularis** - It causes baldness in only one spot in any part of the head.
2. **Alopecia areata multilocularis** - It results into multiple area of hair loss.
3. **Alopecia areata totalis** - In this case the alopecia areata causes the loss of all the hair on the scalp.
4. **Alopecia areata universalis** - Its symptom is the loss of all body hair including pubic hair. The condition is called Alopecia areata barbae if it is limited only to the beard.
5. **Diffuse alopecia areata** - It happens when a psychological trauma causes a person to lose all his dark hairs. And leave him only with mixed grey and dark hairs.

Causes of Alopecia Areata

Emotional and mental stress could also be the alopecia areata cause, as well as trauma, re-location, death in the family, pregnancy, illness, accident or other major life changes. If not the cause itself, with the people carrying the gene, it can be the trigger for the onset of the condition.

Alopecia areata is thought to be an autoimmune disease. The immune system makes white blood cells (lymphocytes) and antibodies to protect against foreign objects such as bacteria, viruses, and other germs. In autoimmune disease, the immune system mistakes part or parts of the body as foreign.

In people with alopecia areata, many white blood cells gather around the affected hair roots (hair follicles) which are mistaken as foreign. This causes some mild inflammation which leads in some way to hairs becoming weak and falling out to cause the bald patches.

Treatment options for Alopecia Areata

- **Not treating is a common option** - Alopecia areata is a very unpredictable condition. In many cases, bald patches re-grow by themselves without treatment.
- **Steroid injections:** Injections of steroid into the bald patches of the scalp suppress the local immune reaction that occurs in alopecia areata. This can then allow the hair follicles to function normally again for hair to re-grow. This doesn't always work.
- **Topical (rub-on) steroid:** Steroid cream, gel, etc, may help hair re-growth, but does not work as well as steroid injections.
- **Minoxidil solution:** This is rubbed into the bald patches and has been shown to promote hair re-growth in some cases. This is the same treatment that is used for the common male pattern baldness. It is not known how it works. The success rate is not high but may be worth a try.
- **Topical immunotherapy:** It is thought that topical immunotherapy is the most effective option for people with extensive alopecia areata. However, this treatment is only done by some skin specialists and so you will need to be referred to one of these specialists for it.

As you can see from the section above, there are various treatment options. It is difficult to say from the outset whether a particular treatment will benefit a particular person. One of the difficulties is that hair grows back without any treatment in many cases. Therefore, it is difficult to research the effect of treatments, as hair may re-grow naturally.

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