

Identifying Alopecia Areata

1 in 5 people with alopecia areata has a close family member who has also developed this condition.

1 Introduction

Alopecia areata is an autoimmune disorder often resulting in unpredictable, sudden hair loss. In most cases, hair falls out in quarter-sized patches from the scalp. The hair may grow back at any time and fall out again, varying from person to person. This condition can begin at any age, though most cases develop before the age of 30. Other types of alopecia areata include alopecia totalis, a total loss of hair on the scalp, and alopecia universalis, complete loss of hair on the scalp, face and body.

2 Causes

Alopecia areata occurs when white blood cells attack the cells in hair follicles, causing them to shrink and slow down hair production. Researchers don't know the exact cause of this condition, but some possible risk factors include:

- Genetics
- Vitamin D deficiency
- History of other autoimmune disorders

3 Symptoms

The main symptom of alopecia areata is patchy hair loss. The loss of hair can develop in just a few days or over a few weeks. Some report itching and burning feelings in the area before hair loss. Other signs of alopecia areata are:

- Short, broken hairs around the edges of bald spots
- Hair loss and regrowth at the same time in different areas
- White hair growth in areas affected by hair loss
- Nail breakage and splitting
- Ridges and dents on the fingernail

4 Treatments

While there is no cure for alopecia areata, many people with milder cases are likely to have the hair regrow without the need for treatment. When seeking treatment, age and the extent of hair loss will be taken into account when making a treatment plan. The main goal of treatment is to stop the immune system's attack on hair follicles and stimulate hair regrowth.

Did you know?

Alopecia areata is a common autoimmune skin disease affecting as many as 6.8 million people in the U.S.

For more information on alopecia areata and supportive resources, please visit www.naaf.org

References:

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