KERRY SKIN CLINIC
SKIN, HAIR + NAILS SPECIALISTS

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Alopecia areata

The term *alopecia* means hair loss. In the form of alopecia known as *alopecia areata*, round bald patches appear suddenly, most often affecting the scalp. Alopecia areata can occur at any age, including in childhood.

Alopecia areata

What causes alopecia areata?

Alopecia areata is considered to be one of the autoimmune disorders - lymphocytes aound the hair follicles release chemical messengers (called cytokines) that reject the hair for unknown reasons. Alopecia areata may occur in more than one member of the family, and such families may develop other autoimmune diseases such as pernicious anaemia and vitiligo. It is also more common in patients with chromosomal disorders such as Down syndrome.

Like many other health problems, stress is often blamed but there is no evidence that stress causes alopecial areata . However , alopecia areata itself may be emotionally very draining .

Alopecia areata is not due to an allergy to foods or hair products . Neither is it caused by an infection or deficiency .

What does it look like?

Alopecia areata is often discovered by a hairdresser, as there are usually no symptoms. The hair stops growing and then falls out from the roots. Alopecia areata has three stages. First there is sudden loss of hair, then enlargement of the patches of hair loss. Lastly new hair grows back, often initially coloured white or grey. It may take months and sometimes years to regrow all the hair. One patch can be falling out while another is regrowing.
Any hair-bearing area can be affected, including eyebrows, eyelashes, beard and body areas.

Treatment

Unfortunately there is not yet any reliable cure for alopecia areata. Luckily the hair usually grows back slowly by itself within 6 to 18 months and styling the hair appropriately ofter helps hid the patches of hair loss .If you die your hair than a light colour is better at camouflaging the patches than a dark colour .Wigs are almost never necessaty . Sometimes the new hair may regrow grey or white, but after a while the original colour and texture usually returns. As some patches regrow new hair loss patches may develop but eventually the whole process settles down usually within 6 to 18 months Topical scalp lotions and creams can sometimes help but can take many months . Medicines which are often tried include topical steroids and minoxidil, and irritants such as dithranol.
Injecting a cortisone medicine into the area of hair loss may speed up the natural regrowth of hair. This treatment is known as an 'intralesional steroid injection'. The regrowth occurs only in the area that has been injected. There is no way of preventing new areas of hair loss. However if they appear, regrowth can be helped by further injections.

Many other treatments have been introduced for alopecia areata, but the results are variable - no one has yet devised anything that works for everyone.

For more information:

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