

Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata is an autoimmune condition that causes hair to fall out in round patches. It can affect the scalp, eyebrows, eyelashes, or other parts of the body.

Why it Happens

Your immune system, which normally protects you from illness, mistakenly attacks your hair follicles. This can cause the hair to fall out suddenly. The exact cause is not fully known, but it may be linked to:

- Family history of autoimmune conditions.
- Stress or illness (in some people).
- Other skin or thyroid conditions.

What you Might Notice

- Small, round bald patches on the scalp or body.
- Hair may regrow and fall out again.
- “Exclamation mark” hairs that are short, broken hairs at the edges of a bald spot.
- Nail changes like ridges or dents (in some cases).

Treatment

Treatment depends on how much hair loss you have and how long it’s been going on.

Options may include:

- **Steroid creams or shots** to calm the immune response.
- **Topical and pill treatments** like minoxidil to help hair regrow.
- **Immunotherapy medicines** for more widespread or stubborn cases.
- **Newer pills (like JAK inhibitors)** may be used in certain situations. Your dermatologist can discuss if this is right for you.

Regrowth can take weeks to months, and treatment may need to be repeated.

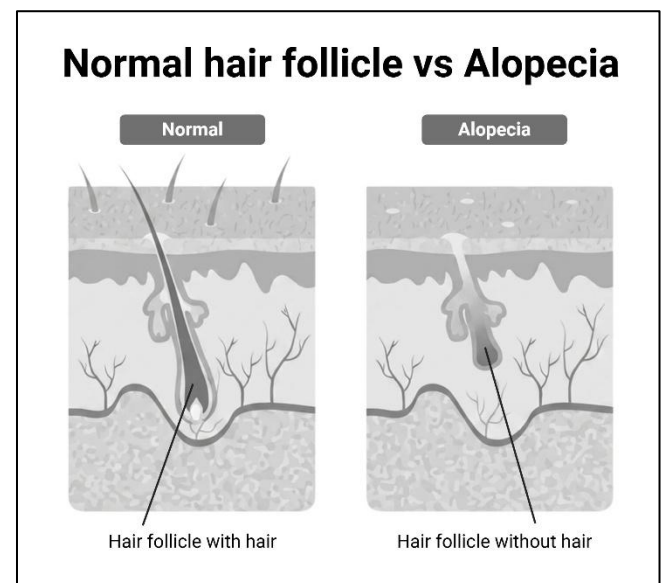
Home Care Tips

- Be gentle with your hair. Avoid harsh styling, heat, or chemicals.
- Consider hats, scarves, or wigs if hair loss is affecting your confidence.
- Manage stress. Relaxation, therapy, or support groups can help.
- Protect bare areas from sunburn with sunscreen or cover-ups.

Additional Information

Learn more at:

- naaf.org – National Alopecia Areata Foundation
- www.aad.org (search “alopecia areata”)



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Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF# 8543.