

Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata is the name given to describe a type of hair loss (*'alopecia'*) which is limited to specific patches of skin (*'areata'*). Although it can occur anywhere on the body, it most commonly arises on the scalp and face. It's caused when the immune system mistakenly attacks random groups of hair follicles.

It's important to understand that *alopecia areata* is neither caused by an infection nor is it contagious. The reason it occurs is unknown. Some patients will report being under significant stress at the time of the breakout, but many others report no change in stress or anxiety levels. Occasionally multiple family members will suffer from *alopecia areata*, so genetics may play a role as well.

The good news is that, in the vast majority of cases, the hair loss caused by *alopecia areata* is temporary. For most, regrowth will occur within a matter of several months *even if no treatment is performed.*

Although most patches of hair loss from *alopecia areata* will resolve on their own, some patients request treatment in hopes of decreasing recovery time. The most common of these treatments is to administer cortisone shots. It's a fairly effective approach, though it does require a number of small injections within the hair loss sites every 4-6 weeks. A number of topical creams and gels are also available. While topical medications can be applied painlessly (no injections required), they generally don't work quite as rapidly.

Regardless of whether treatment is initiated or the hair is allowed to regrow naturally, patients should also understand that *alopecia areata* may occur intermittently throughout one's lifetime. As previously mentioned, stress is sometimes blamed as a trigger though usually no identifiable cause is ever found. Luckily, many patients experience just one episode which resolves on its own, without treatment, within a matter of months.

If you suffer from *alopecia areata*, your dermatologist will review the best approach for you based on your unique situation and treatment expectations.