Alopecia Areata and Emotional Well-Being

A new diagnosis of alopecia areata can have a tremendous impact on you (or your child's) emotional health. Because it is unpredictable, visible, and often develops quickly, people living with alopecia areata may experience a wide range of feelings and challenges, including anxiety and uncertainty, depression and anger.

Over time, however, many people reach a point of acceptance. This doesn't mean losing hope or resigning to the diagnosis; it means finding a new balance, adjusting expectations, and learning to live fully and confidently, with or without hair.

While it can feel challenging, there are many ways to nurture your emotional well-being and strengthen your sense of self. Talking with trusted friends, family, or a counselor can help you process those emotions. Support groups–whether online or in person–can also be a powerful source of encouragement and understanding, reminding you that you are not alone.

Tools to Manage Hair Loss

There are many tools available to help people with alopecia areata manage their hair loss, with an approach that is best for them. Some people with alopecia areata choose to embrace their hair loss. Others might wish to cover or camouflage their hair loss. No matter where you are in your alopecia areata journey, the choice is yours for how you wish to manage your disease. Talk to your provider about an approach that will work best for you. You can also visit naaf.org for more resources on wigs, makeup, and more tools for managing hair loss.

How NAAF Can Help

The National Alopecia Areata Foundation® (NAAF®) offers a supportive community for individuals and their families affected by alopecia areata. Some of NAAF's resources include:

NAAF's Doctor Finder: Helps patients find a healthcare provider near you with expertise in treating alopecia areata.

Support Groups: Including in-person or virtual groups.

Youth Mentor Program: Pairs individuals aged 5–18 with trained mentors, providing one-on-one guidance and emotional support.

Education & Information: Including materials, webinars and information on our website ranging from coping strategies, to working with a healthcare provider, to treatment options, wigs and makeup, and more.

Annual NAAF Conference: Brings together members of the alopecia areata community to learn the latest updates on treatments, coping strategies, and research progress.

Clinical Trials Newsletter: Provides information about the latest research including clinical trial opportunities.

For more information,
Scan the QR code or visit
naaf.org/newly-diagnosed

Statement of Inclusion: Alopecia areata looks different for everyone. NAAF makes every effort to choose images that reflect the diversity of our community and the many ways people choose to live with their disease. Some have partial or total hair loss. Others have spontaneous or treatment-related regrowth, or hair loss that is camouflaged by wigs, head coverings or other tools. Everyone's journey is unique.

National Alopecia Areata Foundation®

Understanding Alopecia Areata

What a New Diagnosis Means

For more information, visit
naaf.org/newly-diagnosed

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What is Alopecia Areata?

Alopecia areata is a chronic, autoimmune disease that affects nearly 7 million people in the U.S. It causes sudden and unpredictable hair loss on the scalp, face, and sometimes other body areas, such as under the arms or on the legs. Some people also develop tiny dents, called stippling, in their nails.

Types of Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata can look different from person to person. Doctors use a few terms to describe the patterns and amount of hair loss, but all of them are presentations of the same disease.

Patchy alopecia areata

This is the most common form. Hair falls out in one or more small, round, or oval patches on the scalp or other areas where hair normally grows. Some people with mild, patchy alopecia areata may see their hair grow back on its own, even without treatment. For many, the patches can come and go over time, with periods of hair loss followed by regrowth.

Alopecia totalis

This form of alopecia areata involves complete hair loss on the scalp.

Alopecia universalis

This is the most extensive form of alopecia areata, involving hair loss over the entire body, including the scalp, eyebrows, eyelashes, and body hair.

Diffuse alopecia areata

Instead of patches, this type of alopecia areata causes sudden, overall thinning across the scalp, which can look more like general hair shedding.

Ophiasis pattern

In this pattern, hair loss appears in a band along the sides and back of the head rather than in round patches.

Even though these names describe different hair loss patterns, they all reflect the same underlying disease: alopecia areata.

Available Treatment

Treatments for alopecia areata depend on the severity of the disease, the patient's age, and any co-occurring conditions, such as atopic dermatitis. Your dermatologist typically determines disease severity based on the extent of scalp hair loss, as well as other factors, such as eyelash and eyebrow loss, and how long you have had the disease.

For mild, patchy forms of the disease, treatments can include topical or intralesional corticosteroids and oral minoxidil. For those with more moderate disease, your provider might suggest pulse corticosteroids–a high dose of an oral steroid administered over a short period.

Recently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved medications for treating severe alopecia areata in adolescents and adults. All of these are from a class of drugs called Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors. Some providers might prescribe one of these treatments "off-label," meaning it is not FDA-approved specifically for alopecia areata in children or teens but is approved for other uses or age groups.

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