

Lifetime Medical Associates *

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What is alopecia?

Alopecia (pronounced al-o-pe-she-ah) is hair loss.

The hair can be lost from any part of the body such as scalp, eyebrows, under your arms, pubic area, arms, and legs. Hair may be lost in only a small area or from much of your body.

Many things can cause alopecia. It's often related to the presence of male hormones, worry and stress, poor nutrition, low blood count and if you have thyroid problems.

Women often lose hair after a pregnancy. Ringworm can cause hair loss. Some medicines, such as oral contraceptives, anticancer medicines, blood thinners, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines, and many others, can also cause you to lose hair.

Sometimes your hairstyle may be the cause. Tight braiding or tightly winding your hair around hot rollers can cause hair loss. It can also occur if you tug on your hair.

Hair can be lost because of infections, burns, and severe illness, and even after having had major surgery.



What treatment is needed?

Your doctor may give you cream to apply to the areas of hair loss. These creams can help hair to regrow. You put the creams on immediately after bathing or shampooing for better results.

You'll also be treated for any illness that may be causing your hair loss, such as an infection, ringworm, anemia, or a hormone imbalance.

Sometimes, your doctor may use a needle and syringe to inject medicine into small areas of hair loss.

For hair loss on the scalp, scalp reduction therapy can be done. It provides an instant appearance of more hair. In scalp reduction therapy, your doctor removes a strip of scalp. It is repeated about every 4 weeks until the edges of hair meet, or until the scalp tissue becomes too thin.

Hair transplants can permanently restore your hair. Wigs and hair weaves may be used reduce the appearance of hair loss.

'Cold caps' can be used to help prevent loss of scalp hair if you have anticancer treatment. A cold cap is a scalp-cooling system. It's put onto your scalp before and after your anticancer treatment.



Do

- Do wear a hairpiece or wig
- Do bathe and shampoo as usual
- Do be sure to follow your doctor's advice if you have anemia or thyroid problems. Anemia and certain thyroid problems can cause alopecia
- Do avoid alkaline pH shampoos
- Do pat your hair dry rather than rubbing it with a towel
- Do use a comb rather than a brush, and never brush your hair when it is wet
- Do use a conditioner to make your hair easier to comb
- Do call your doctor if there are signs of infection after treatment with steroid injections. Signs of infection include redness, swelling, tenderness, and warmth at the site of the injections



Don't

- Don't tug on normal hair close to areas of hair loss
- Don't damage your hair by bleaching, permanent waving, or straightening it, using hot combs or overly hot dryers, or having excessive sun exposure



Recovery time

Fortunately, loss of hair usually stops, and new hair fills in. However, this may take from 18 months to 3 years. Regrowth of hair is usually best if the hair loss was not severe, only happening in a few small patches. Sometimes, the hair does not all return.

Alopecia can happen again. It returns in one-quarter of people who have had it.

Treatment doesn't always work. Sometimes, hair loss gets worse with treatment.



What can be done to stop it from happening again?

Alopecia can't be prevented at the present time. Try to reduce worry and stress as they can sometimes cause hair loss.



Further information on alopecia can be found from:

The National Alopecia Areata Foundation

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