

Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata is a condition that causes hair loss in patches, usually on the scalp.

What is alopecia areata?

Alopecia areata (al-oh-PEE-shah ar-ee-AH-tah) is a condition that causes hair to fall out in patches shaped like circles or ovals. Hair loss is most common on the scalp but can be anywhere on the body.

In alopecia areata, the body's immune system attacks hair where it grows (follicles), so the hair stops growing. The skin in the affected areas is healthy. Sometimes, alopecia areata can make your scalp itch and cause small pits or dents in the nails. Usually there are no other symptoms.

Most children with alopecia areata are healthy. Some may have a higher risk of other conditions where the body attacks itself (autoimmune disease), such as thyroid disease and white or lighter patches of skin (vitiligo).

Sometimes, people lose all the hair on their head (alopecia totalis) or all the hair on their body (alopecia universalis).

What is alopecia areata like for children?

There is no test to predict how much hair loss will happen. There is no way to determine if or when hair will grow back. Most children who lose hair in one patch eventually grow it back. Hair loss can happen again. Talk with your child's healthcare provider about what to expect.

How is it treated?

Medicines that help hair grow back can be applied to the skin (topical), injected or taken by mouth. It is hard to predict how well they will work.

These medicines may help treat the hair loss, but they do not cure it and may not prevent other areas from having new hair loss. Some children wear hats, scarves or change their hair style to cover the areas. Some children wear wigs.

Where can I get support and more information?

Emotional support is an important part of care for a child with alopecia areata. These sites can be helpful in finding support and information:

- Children's Alopecia Project
childrensalopeciaproject.org
- The local Children's Alopecia Project Facebook group
facebook.com/groups/CAPKidGroupSeattle/
- The National Alopecia Areata Foundation
naaf.org

To Learn More

- Dermatology
206-987-2158
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



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Seattle Children's offers free interpreter services for patients, family members and legal representatives who are deaf or hard of hearing or speak a language other than English. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your healthcare provider.

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