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Hair Loss Disease: Alopecia Universalis by Naomi Mannino

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Alopecia Universalis is Total Body, Facial and Scalp Hair loss

Where did all my hair go, and when is it coming back?

Alopecia is simply the general medical term for hair loss, and alopecia areata is the most common form of an unusual autoimmune skin disease resulting in patchy hair loss on the scalp. The most uncommon form of the disease is called alopecia universalis, when hair loss extends beyond the scalp to total body and facial hair loss.

Alopecia areata affects approximately 2 percent of the overall U.S. population, or more than 5 million people, according to the National Alopecia Areata Foundation (NAAF). In the 1990s, the disease was classified as an autoimmune disease; researchers had found that it is the result of the body producing an inappropriate immune response against itself. And while the cause of this autoimmune disease is unknown, many hair loss specialists have noticed a link between sudden stress and the onset of the disease. Alopecia universalis is considered a skin disease because it occurs on all skin, including the scalp, so it is usually diagnosed by a dermatologist. Experts agree that as troubling as it is to lose all of your hair, the disease does not include general physical illness, rashes, hives or itching, although exposed scalp and skin areas do require extra care from exposure to the elements, especially the sun.

What does "autoimmune" mean?

According to the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions Autoimmune Disease Research Center, a healthy human body's immune system is composed of an effective set of weapons against viruses, bacteria, and parasites that can attack the body. Unfortunately, this powerful immune system sometimes mistakenly attacks the body itself; this is called autoimmunity. In alopecia universalis the hair follicles all over your body are mistakenly attacked by your own immune system, resulting in the total loss of hair on your body, face and head, although your overall health remains unaffected.

There is no known cure for the condition, but the hair follicles are unharmed and remain alive and ready to resume normal hair production whenever they receive the appropriate signal. Hair regrowth may occur even without treatment and even after many years, according to the NAAF.

Is it in my genes?

Experts believe there is a genetic component to the different forms of alopecia areata, including alopecia universalis, because one out of five people with symptoms have a family member also affected by hair loss, according to the NAAF. Alopecia universalis most often presents during childhood, although it can occur at any age and affects both males and females.

Current research indicates that if onset begins after age 30, you are less likely to have an affected family member. When onset of any type of alopecia begins before age 30, it is more likely that other family members as well are affected. The NAAF has focused a lot of its research into investigating the genetic elements of the disease in order to eventually identify who is most susceptible to the disease and why.

Treatment options

The NAAF states that there are no FDA-approved treatments specifically for alopecia universalis; however, many medical professionals are willing to try treatments off-label, especially for the patchy scalp hair loss of alopecia areata, but none of the acceptable treatments work in all cases. Currently, researchers are experimenting with stem cell and platelet infusions and injections to stimulate the hair growth cycle.

The best fix -- a non-surgical hair replacement

There are beautiful medical-grade hair replacement options that are the most natural, comfortable choice for replacing the hair on your head and helping you feel better about your condition on a daily basis. These include wigs meant to be worn on a completely bald scalp, without slipping. They have a monofilament cap that lets your real scalp show through, as if the hair were growing right out of it. Budget permitting, you can also choose hand-tied knots, which move in many directions just like real hair, unlike machine-made wefts, which move in only one direction. Visit a hair loss specialist, who can match your previous hair color, texture and style quickly with a medically necessary hair replacement wig to beautifully and naturally cover your alopecia universalis, at least on your head.

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Naomi Mannino is a freelance writer who writes about health, beauty, and fashion. She is a contributing writer for HairLossDotCom and writes about hair loss conditions such as a alopecia universalis and a alopecia areata

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