



# Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata is a condition that causes hair loss in circular or oval 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. The patches are usually circular or oval in shape. They are most common on the scalp, but can be anywhere on the body.

In alopecia areata, the body's immune system attacks the hair follicles, so that the hair stops growing. The actual skin on the affected areas is usually perfectly healthy. Occasionally, alopecia areata can cause the scalp to itch slightly and nail changes to occur, but usually there are no other related symptoms.

Most children with alopecia areata are otherwise healthy. Some children with alopecia areata may have a higher risk of other autoimmune conditions, such as thyroid disease and white patches of skin (vitiligo).

Occasionally, hair loss will affect all of the hair on the scalp (alopecia totalis) or all of the hair on the body (alopecia universalis).

## To Learn More

- Dermatology  
206-987-2158
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

## Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's 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.

## What is the normal course for alopecia areata?

The course of alopecia areata (how often hair falls out, how much falls out, and the possibility of hair regrowth) is very hard to predict. Most children who have hair loss in one patch will eventually grow back their hair. Hair loss can also happen again. Talk with your child's healthcare provider about what to expect.

## How is it treated?

There are some medicines that you apply to the skin (topical medicines) that can help the hair grow back. There are also some injectable medicines that can help the hair regrow. The response to these treatments is variable and hard to predict.

These therapies may help treat the hair loss, but they do not cure it or prevent other areas from having new hair loss. Some children wear hats, head bands, scarves or change their hair style to cover the areas. Sometimes a family will choose to buy a wig for their child if the hair loss is significant.

## Support and further 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

[www.childrensalopeciaproject.org](http://www.childrensalopeciaproject.org)

### The National Alopecia Areata Foundation

[www.naaf.org](http://www.naaf.org)

### The local Children's Alopecia Project Facebook group

[www.facebook.com/groups/CAPKidGroupSeattle/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/CAPKidGroupSeattle/)

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. 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 child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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