

Alopecia areata is a disorder characterized by loss of hair. Sometimes, this means simply a few bare patches on the scalp. In other cases, hair loss is more extensive. Although the exact cause is not known, this is thought to be an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system, the body's own defense system, mistakenly attacks the hair follicles, the tiny structures from which hairs grow. Unpredictable hair loss is the only noticeable symptom of this disorder. Regrowth of hair may or may not occur. Hair loss is usually confined to the head and face, although the entire body may be involved. Alopecia areata affects males and females in equal numbers. It may appear at any age, but most typically begins during childhood. There are approximately 2.5 million individuals in the United States affected by alopecia areata.