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ALOPECIA AREATA

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Synonyms: Porrigo decalvans; Tinea decalvans; Area Celsi; Alopecia circumscripta; Vitiligo capitis; Ophiasis; Pelade.

Alopecia areata is a disease of the hairy regions, especially the scalp. It is characterized by complete loss of hair in circumscribed round, oval or irregular areas. In the majority of cases the disease is confined to the scalp, but may affect the beard, the eye-brows and lashes, the pubic and axillary hairs or those of the general body surface. Occasionally the loss of hair is universal and even the lanugo may disappear. The skin in an affected region is not at all or only very slightly altered. Sometimes a mild parasthesia precedes the loss of hair. On the scalp several spots generally appear, simultaneously or at intervals. It may happen that the hair is returning in one area while it falls in another. The bare skin is smooth, white and may be slightly depressed below the level of the healthy integument. Usually the hair drops out suddenly, but the patch may increase in size by gradual loss at the margin. In this manner two or more patches often coalesce. While the disease is progressing the marginal hairs are loose and can be easily extracted. Stumps are sometimes found and these are often thicker at the distal end than at the mouth of the follicle, so that they have been likened to exclamation points. The beginning of recovery is marked by the appearance of a fine down on the bald spot. The filaments increase gradually in size and number but usually reach a

vigorous growth long before they assume their natural pigmentation. They are always at first a lighter shade than the old hair and may be pure white. Not infrequently the hair falls out two or more times in the same area and the fine down is especially liable to recur in several crops before it finally develops to a mature growth. The disease may persist for from three months to several years. The hair is not always regained. In the partial form in young persons the prognosis is very good, but in universal alopecia or in any severe case after middle life permanent baldness is apt to result. The cause of the disease is not known. **DIAGNOSIS:** *Trichophytosis capitis* occurs only in children and is usually easily distinguishable from alopecia areata by the scaliness or roughness of the patch and the presence of deformed hairs and frayed stumps. *Lupus erythematosus* is to be differentiated by the cicatricial character of the bald spot with the destruction of the hair follicles and by the mildly inflammatory border. **TREATMENT:** It is difficult to judge the effect of treatment in so erratic a disease as alopecia areata. Numberless remedies are recommended and many have undoubtedly received credit for spontaneous recoveries. The most popular preparations are nearly all either irritant or parasiticidal. An ointment consisting of a drachm of iodine crystals in an ounce of goose grease combines both properties, and has been used with success.