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## DEALING WITH ALOPECIA

As Will Smith–Chris Rock’s fiasco brings alopecia to limelight, here’s all you need to know about this autoimmune disorder

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Your chances of getting alopecia are slightly greater if you have a blood relative with this condition. DR VINAY SINGH, Senior consultant, dermatology, Paras Hospitals Gurugram



For a woman, having a bald patch is emotionally disturbing and it's very difficult for them to fight the stigma that comes with it. DR NISHITA RANKA BAGMAR, Dermatologist

A common autoimmune disorder resulting in loss of hair has taken the centre stage in the aftermath of (actor) Will Smith–(comedian) Chris Rock saga at this year's Oscars. Actor Jada Pinkett Smith revealed four years ago that she suffers from alopecia, which led to her shaving her head. Rock joked about her baldness at the ceremony, and she clearly showed her disappointment. The joke didn't go down well with her husband, Smith and he smacked Rock in the face.

Jada's condition is called alopecia areata, an autoimmune disease that causes hair loss in either patches or entirely. Alopecia affects both men and women, and there are various reasons why one can experience this condition.

Dr Debeshi Bhattacharjee, cosmetologist, says, "The different types of alopecia include alopecia areata, a disease that causes sudden smooth, circular patches of hair loss; and alopecia totalis, a condition that results in no hair on the scalp." Then there is Alopecia universalis, which results in no hair on any part of the body. Hair loss resulting from a genetic predisposition to effects of dihydrotestosterone (DHT) on the hair follicles, is known as androgenic alopecia.

### FACTORS

Commonly known as male and female pattern baldness, alopecia affects all genders and ages. "Anyone can develop this condition. However, your chances of getting alopecia are slightly greater if you have a relative with this condition. It is seen that the condition is common in people who have family members with autoimmune disorders, like diabetes or thyroid disease. Both children and adults may develop alopecia areata," says Dr Vinay Singh, senior consultant, dermatology, Paras Hospitals Gurugram.

"The most common factor is genetic hair loss which runs in families. This is followed by telogen effluvium or temporary hair fall caused due to illness, stress and seasonal change. Then there are disease

based alopecias like alopecia areata, scarring alopecias, hair shaft disorders,” says Dr Gaurang Krishna, director consultant dermatologist and hair transplant surgeon, MedLinks.

#### CAUSES

However, there are certain differences in male and female hair loss. “On one hand, male pattern hair loss is predominantly genetic and is caused due to male hormone (DHT) sensitivity. On the other hand, female pattern hair loss is multifactorial and is due to genetics, hormones, diet, thyroid issues, stress, use of heating and styling products,” adds Dr Krishna.

#### EFFECTS ON WOMEN

In women, it is manifested as hair thinning, loss of volume in general and over the ponytail or plait, broadening of centre partition or maang and excessive hair shedding. Alopecia areata can affect a woman very commonly on the scalp or the eyebrows, and one has to be on the lookout for this, once you get one patch, because very often the patients don't even know that the patch exists. So, once you notice a patch, it's important to examine the entire scalp for any other patches.

“For women, having bald patches gets emotionally disturbing, that they often are not able to attend any public gatherings, nor be able to socialise. It's very difficult for them to fight the stigma that comes with it. Often they tend to end up with low self-confidence, depression, anxiety, self-hatred, shame and even suicidal thoughts. But remember, there is a key to every door,” says Dr Nishita Ranka Bagmar, dermatologist, medical director and founder of Dr Nishita's Clinic for Skin, Hair and Aesthetics.