



Review Article

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EXPLORING THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF HOMOEOPATHY IN ALOPECIA AREATA: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

Alopecia areata is a common, immune-mediated, non-scarring hair loss disorder characterized by unpredictable relapsing–remitting episodes. Affecting both children and adults, Alopecia areata has a substantial psychosocial burden and remains therapeutically challenging due to its heterogeneous presentation and variable natural history.

KEY WORDS:

Alopecia areata, Hair follicle, Homoeopathy

INTRODUCTION:¹

The hair follicle undergoes following stages throughout our lives:

- ANAGEN (growth phase): Scalp hair: 2-8 years, rest sites vary between 1 month and 7 months
- CATAGEN (involution): Cessation of mitotic activity by matrix cells and apoptosis.
- TELOGEN (resting phase) and exogen (shedding phase): About 1% of telogen hairs are shed everyday. Scalp hair grows fastest, at the rate of 0.37 – 0.44 mm/day or 1cm/month.

ALOPECIA:^{2,3}

- Alopecia is a general term used for hair loss.

- This may be permanent or temporary (from androgenic journal)
- It can be classified as scarring and non scarring, diffuse and focal in each category.
- Common causes of alopecia in children are:

CLASSIFICATION OF ALOPECIA:^{2,4}

ALOPECIA :

Non scarring

Scarring

1. Non scarring

A) Localized

- Alopecia areata
- Trichotillomania
- Tinea capitis

B) Diffuse:

Congenital and hereditary alopecia

- Congenital and universal atrichia
- atrichia with papules
- Hereditary vitamin D – resistant rickets
- Ectodermal dysplasia

Alopecia due to Hair cycle defects

- Telogen hair loss
- Anagen hair loss
- Short anagen syndrome

Alopecia due to Hair Shaft Defects:

- Hair fractures
- Hair nodes
- Unruly hair

Others:

- Alopecia subtotalis
- Alopecia totalis
- Alopecia universalis

Scarring includes:

- Primary
- Secondary
- Developmental defects and hereditary disorders

Primary includes: Lymphocytic, Neutrophilic, Mixed

Secondary includes: Traumatic, Sclerosing, Granulomatous, Infectious, Neoplastic

ALOPECIA AREATA:

Introduction

The word 'Alopecia' is the medical term used for baldness which actually comes from a Greek word for fox 'Alopex', and was given that name because of the fur loss associated with fox mange. On the other hand, the word 'Areata' originates from a Latin word 'Area', which refers to an open area or patch.⁵

Alopecia areata is an autoimmune disorder that affects the hair follicles and results in hair loss. It is a common form of non-scarring alopecia. It often manifests as distinct bald patches on the scalp, although it can also result in hair loss across the body's hair-bearing regions.^{6,7}

Incidence:^{8,9}

The condition affects children and young adults. The lifetime incidence of alopecia areata is 0.1–0.2% of the population. More than half of affected patients are younger than 20 year of age.

Etiology and Pathogenesis: ^{1,9,10}

Alopecia areata is a T-cell-driven autoimmune disorder producing nonscarring alopecia. It is a complex, chronic organ specific auto immune disease mediated by CD8+ T – cells predominantly affecting hair, sometimes nails. The cause is unknown. It is hypothesized that in genetically susceptible individuals, loss of immune privilege of the hair follicle allows for

T-cell inflammation against anagen hairs and follicles, leading to stoppage of hair growth. Family history is positive in 10-42% cases. It is believed that it tends to run in families.



Fig 1: Circular patch of alopecia areata with normal- appearing scalp ⁹

Types:¹

- Alopecia areata may present as several types:
 - a) Circumscribed
 - b) Ophiasis (involving the hair line margins)
 - c) Saisipho (sparing ophiasis areas)
 - d) Reticular (innumerable small areas which coalesce)
 - e) Diffuse
 - f) Totalis (loss of scalp hair)
 - g) Universalis (loss of whole body hair)
- It may be associated with thyroid diseases, cataract, vitiligo, atopic dermatitis, psoriasis and down syndrome.
- There is usually positive family history, atopy and associated nail changes.

Clinical manifestations:^{1,8,9}

- Alopecia areata is characterized by rapid and complete loss of hair in round or oval patches on the scalp, eyebrows, eyelashes, and on other body sites.
- In alopecia totalis, all the scalp hair is lost.
- Alopecia universalis involves all body and scalp hair.
- The skin within the plaques of hair loss appears normal.

- Alopecia areata is associated with atopy and with nail changes such as pits, longitudinal striations, and leukonychia.
- Autoimmune diseases such as Hashimoto thyroiditis, Addison disease, pernicious anemia, ulcerative colitis, myasthenia gravis, collagen vascular diseases, and vitiligo may also be seen.
- An increased incidence of alopecia areata has been reported in patients with Down syndrome (5–10%).
- Ophiasis is a band like pattern of hair loss from periphery of the scalp.
- Nails may occasionally show fine pitting and thinning of the nail plate.
- Spontaneous remission is common. Initially, the regrowing hairs are grey, but regain color over period of time.
- Poor prognostic features include onset in childhood, ophiasis, association with atopy and widespread alopecia.
- Clinically black dots, cadaver hair, pinot noir or exclamation mark hair are seen.
- Histopathology demonstrates swarm of bees appearance due to T-cell infiltrate around hair follicles.

Trichoscopy shows:¹

- Hair with variable hair shaft thickness (thick terminal hair and thin miniaturized vellus hair)
- Black dots – represent fractured shafts before emanating from the scalp, indicator of active disease.
- White dots – represent empty hair follicles and opening of eccrine sweat ducts.
- Yellow dots – represent sebaceous material admixed with keratin
- Micro-exclamation mark hair – tapered proximal end and thickened distal end.
- Broken hair
- Coudability hair – proximal tapering of normal hair (suggestive of active alopecia areata)
- Circle hair (pig tail hair) – seen in both acute and chronic alopecia areata.

Differential Diagnosis:⁹

Tinea capitis, seborrheic dermatitis, trichotillomania, traumatic alopecia, and lupus erythematosus should be considered in the differential diagnosis of alopecia areata.

Management:⁹

Spontaneous resolution in 6-12 months is usual, particularly when relatively small, stable patches of alopecia are present. But recurrences are common. Onset at a young age, extensive or prolonged hair loss, and numerous episodes are usually poor prognostic signs. Alopecia universalis, alopecia totalis, and alopecia ophiasis—a type of alopecia areata in which hair loss is circumferential—are also less likely to resolve. Therapy is difficult to evaluate because the course is erratic and unpredictable. The use of highly potent or super potent topical corticosteroids is effective in some patients.

HOMOEOPATHIC MANAGEMENT:

Homoeopathy is one of the systems of medicine. It was discovered by Dr. Christian Fredrich Samuel Hahnemann at the latter part of 18th century.¹¹

Homoeopathic remedies are produced from small quantities of animals, plants, minerals and various natural sources through a standardized process called dynamization or potentization. This process involves repeated dilution and shaking (succussion) to amplify the inherent healing power of the substances to its maximum. Homoeopathic medicines are affordable, easy to take, free from harmful side effects and simple to administer.¹²

Health:

According to Stuart close - It is a balanced state in a living being where all vital functions work together harmoniously to maintain the organism's well being and support normal growth and development.¹³

Disease:

According to Kent and close – Disease can develop due to the body's overall vulnerability, which depends on how strong or weak the immune system is when facing internal or

environmental stress. Additionally, a disturbed mental state can also trigger the onset of illness.^{14,15}

According to Hahnemann –

Aphorism 4 and 5 -

A physician's role is to maintain health, which requires understanding the root cause of illness. True healing can only happen once that underlying cause is addressed and eliminated.^{16,17}

Miasmatic background:¹⁸

Psora miasm:

- Falling of hair after acute diseases, acute fevers, old diseases, chest diseases, parturition
- Bald spots on head

Sycosis miasm:

- Hair falls out in circular spots.
- Falling of hair from the beard

Syphilis miasm:

- Falling of hair from eye lashes and eye brows.
- Hair falls out from beard because of skin eruptions.
- Hair matted together (plica polonica)

Repertorial approach:

From Kent repertory ¹⁹ –

Head – Hair baldness: *Anac., apis., Bar-c, fl-ac., graph., hep., lyc., phos., sep., sil., zinc.*

Patches: *Apis., calc., graph., hep., lyc., phos., sep*

Young people: *Bar-c., sil*

From Boger Boenninghausen repertory ²⁰ -

Head - external - hair - *falling out*, from *head*: *Alu.*, **Amb.**, *am-c.*, **Ars.**, *AUR.*, **Bar-c.**, *bell.*, **Bor.**, *bov.*, *CALC-C.*, **Canth.**, **Carb-v.**, *dulc.*, *fer.*, *flu-ac.*, *GRAP.*, *hell.*, *HEP.*, **Ign.**, *iod.*, *KALI-C.*, *lach.*, **Lyc.**, **Merc.**, *merc-c.*, *NAT-M.*, *nit-ac.*, *par.*, **Petr.**, *PHO.*, **Pho-ac.**, *plb.*, *rhus-t.*, **Sars.**, *sec-c.*, *sele.*, **Sep.**, **Sil.**, **Staph.**, *SUL.*, *thu.*, *zin.*

Head - external – in bunches, spots etc : **Canth.**, *hep.*, **Iod.**, *petr.*, *pho.*

From Murphy repertory ²¹ –

Hair, general, head and body – **baldness**, head – *anac.*, *apis.*, **BAR-C.**, *fl-ac.*, *graph.*, *hep.*, *lyc.*, *med.*, *morg.*, **PH-AC.**, *phos.*, *pix.*, *sel.*, *sep.*, **SIL.**, **STANN.**, *syc-co.*, *zinc.*

patches, in – *apis.*, *ars.*, *calc.*, *calc-p.*, *car-an.*, *fl-ac.*, *graph.*, *hep.*, *kali-p.*, *lyc.*, *morg.*, *phos.*, *psor.*, *sep*

spots, in – *apis.*, *ars.*, *calc.*, *calc-p.*, *carb-an.*, **FL-AC.**, *hep.*, *phos.*, *psor*

From synthesis repertory ²² -

Head – Alopecia -

Head – Hair – baldness

Head – Hair – falling

Skin – Hair – falling out

Head – Hair – baldness (1st and 2nd grade remedies) – *Anac*, *Apis*, *Ars*, **Bar-c**, *Calc*, *Fl-ac*, *Graph*, *Kali-s*, *Phos*, *Sep*, *Sil*, *Thuj*, *Zinc*

Skin – Hair – falling out (1st and 2nd grade remedies) – *Alum*, *Calc*, *Carb-v*, *Graph*, *Nat-m*, *Sec*, *Sel*

Other remedies -

From lillenthal ²³ -

- After severe acute diseases: *Chin*, *Fer*, *Calc*, *Carb v*, *Hep*, *Lyc*, *Sil*
- Caused by long grief: *Ign*, *Lach*, *Phos ac*, *Staph*
- On the eyebrows : *Agar*, *Bell*, *Caust*, *Kali carb*
- When the hair falls off on the sides of the head : *Graph*, *Phos*
- On the forehead : *Ars*, *Nat mur*, *Phos*

- On the vertex: Bar c, Graph, Lyc, Sep, Zinc
- On the occiput: Carb v, Petr, Phos, Sil
- On the temples: Calc, Kali carb, Lyc, Nat-m
- For some places getting bald: Canth, Iod, Phos
- Dissolve a tea spoonful of table salt in a pint of water and rub it over bald spaces.

From Textbook of Dermatology for Homeopaths ²⁴ -

- Alopecia totalis and universalis – *Syph., Ust*
- Alopecia of eyebrows – *Agar., Caust., Kali-c*
- Patches of hair loss in moustache – *Nat-m., Plb*
- Other drugs include – *Ars., Calc., Cortiso., Graph., Kali-p., Lepr., Lyc., Morg-g., Hep*

Therapeutics -

Ceanothus Americanus:²⁵

- For hairfall
- Ceanothus Q 2 to 5 drops three times a day. It can be applied locally on scalp as hair tonic.

Baryta carb:²³

- Baldness, especially of the crown, in young people.
- Scalp very sensitive to touch
- < from scratching

Acid fluor:²³

- Itching of head and falling off of the hair
- The new hair is dry and breaks off.

Calcarea carb:²³

- Hair falls out when combing.
- Dryness of hair
- Great sensitiveness of scalp, with yellowish or white scales on scalp
- Sensation of coldness of outer head.

Vinca minor:²³

- Hair falls out in single spots and white hair grows there.
- Spots on head oozing moisture, the hair matting together.

Lycopodium:²³

- Hair becomes gray early; hair falls off after abdominal diseases; after parturition; with burning, scalding, itching of the scalp, especially on getting warm from exercise during the day.

Selenium:²³

- Hair falls off when combing; also of eyebrows, genitals
- Tingling and itching on scalp, which feels tense and contracted.

Natrum mur:²³

- Hair falls out if touched; most frequently of head, temples and beard
- Scalp very sensitive; face shining as if greasy.

Phosphorous:^{23,26,27}

- Round patches on scalp completely deprived of hair
- Falling off of the hair in large bundles on the forehead and on the sides above the ears
- The roots of the hair seem to be dry
- The denuded scalp looks clear, white and smooth
- Dandruff copious, falls out in clouds.
- Feels as if pulled by hair

Carbo-veg:²⁸

- Falling out of hair, after severe disease or abuse of mercury, with great sensitiveness of scalp to pressure.

Mancinella:²⁸

- Losing hair after severe acute diseases

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