

Patient Information for Central Centrifugal Cicatricial Alopecia

Overview

Central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia (CCCA) is a progressive, inflammatory, scarring alopecia that presents with hair loss originating on the center (crown) of the scalp that gradually widens. While it was formerly known as chemically induced cosmetic alopecia, follicular degeneration syndrome, and hot comb alopecia, those terms have since been replaced by CCCA because the disease has not been proven to be caused only by specific hair care practices.



While the exact causes of CCCA are unclear, it is thought to be due to a combination of factors, including an underlying genetic predisposition that is triggered by traumatic hair care practices. Other factors that have been implicated but not conclusively proven include scalp infections and type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Because of the initially slow progression, lack of symptoms, and location of the hair loss, many affected by CCCA might be unaware of it unless it is pointed out to them or it becomes severe. Therefore, individuals often present to a dermatologist with a late stage of CCCA, suffering from significant and permanent hair loss. Many of the complications of CCCA stem from this late diagnosis.

While men and children are rarely affected, it is important to screen family members of affected individuals given that there may be an underlying genetic predisposition present.

Who's At Risk

CCCA predominantly affects Black women, with an estimated prevalence of 3%-6% and an average age of onset of 36 years in that demographic. CCCA is the most common form of scarring alopecia (irreversible hair loss) in people of African descent.

Signs & Symptoms

CCCA typically begins with increased hair breakage or thinning at the crown of the scalp. While hair loss is often the only sign, it can also be accompanied by small red or white acne lesions around the hair follicles, scaly skin, itchiness, pain, tenderness, or a "pins and needles" sensation on the scalp. As it progresses, the hair loss expands outwardly and reveals a shiny, smooth scalp.

Self-Care Guidelines & When to Seek Medical Care

Treatment is primarily aimed at stopping the progression of CCCA and saving the hair follicles with Dr. Ekpo and her team's expertise. It is important to avoid chemical processing and heat or traction-inducing hairstyles (those that cause pulling of the hair). Hair transplant is an option in the case of limited scarring and controlled CCCA.

Treatment has been shown to be most effective in those with signs of active disease, such as inflammation and ongoing hair loss. In these earliest stages of disease, hair follicles may recover after treatment and allow for hair regrowth. However, once CCCA progresses to the scarring stage, the hair follicles are permanently damaged. At this stage, treatment is focused on limiting the progression of the disease. Thus, early diagnosis and treatment are key to maximizing the likelihood of successful treatment. Hair transplantation success is dependent on the degree of scarring. Dr. Ekpo recommends patients with scarring hair loss that want to undergo hair transplantation to also get scalp micropigmentation (SMP), medical scalp tattooing, afterwards in the areas where the grafts are not able to take due to scarring. This will allow for beautiful results and the appearance of fuller hair when done in conjunction after hair transplantation. When you see a board-certified dermatologist, like Dr. Ekpo, you see a doctor who has the training, knowledge, and the expertise necessary to diagnose and treat your hair loss. Dr. Ekpo and her team can discuss a personalized hair restoration plan with you to help achieve your realistic hair goals.