

Hair Loss on the Scalp

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A 42-year-old, African woman presents with an 18-month history of hair loss on the scalp vertex that has gradually spread centrifugally. She has used multiple chemical relaxers over the past two to three years.

What is your Diagnosis?

Central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia is characterized by hair loss that starts at the vertex or mid-top of the scalp and gradually progresses in a centrifugal pattern with destruction and replacement of follicles by fibrous tissue. The affected scalp is often smooth and shiny, owing to massive hair follicular dropout. Typically, a few short, brittle hairs remain within the scarred expanse. Affected patients often suffer from varying degrees of itch, pain, and burning sensation. The condition is most commonly seen in middle-aged women of African descent. Traumatic hairstyling involving traction, chemicals, and heat may be responsible to a certain extent. There is also a genetic predisposition to this condition.

Early recognition and treatment may halt further progression of the inflammatory and destructive process. Hairstyles that require heat treatment or produce traction and damaging hair grooming practices, such as chemical relaxers, should be avoided.



Topical or intralesional corticosteroids and systemic antibiotics may be useful for early lesions. Camouflage techniques, such as custom wigs and hair weaving, may be considered for end-stage scarring. Hair transplantation is also an option for burnt-out disease.

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