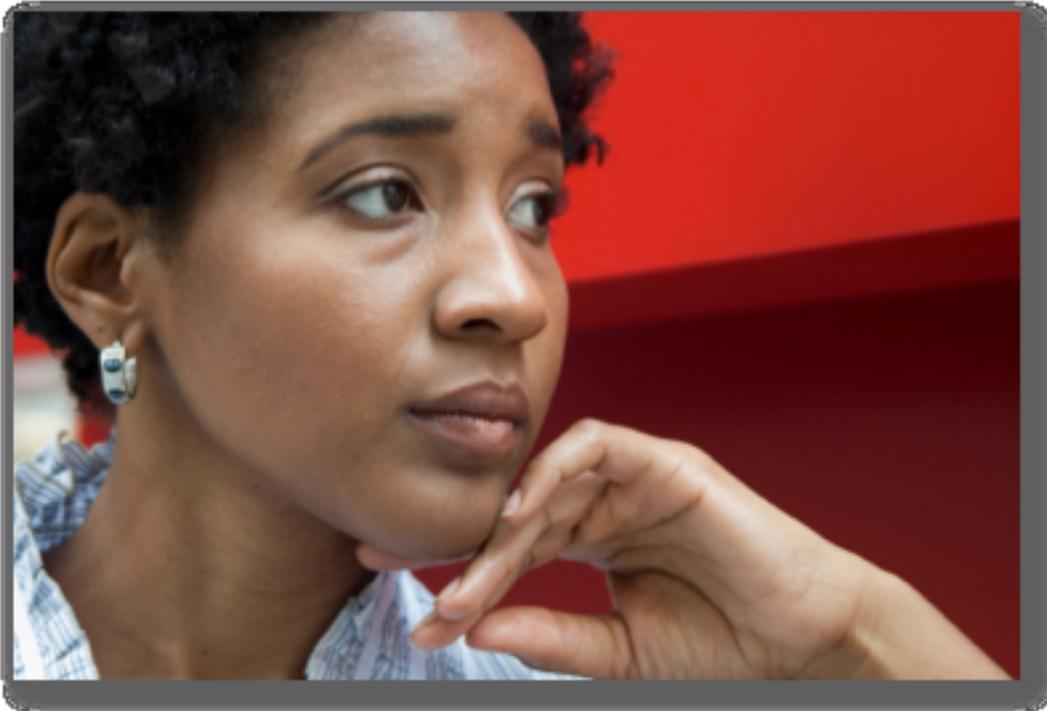


# **Black Hair Loss Answers**

## **Medical Facts to Help Save Your Hair**

A Special Medical Report on African American Hair Loss, Causes of Baldness and Treatment

By Seymour M. Weaver III, M.D.



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[www.BlackHairLossAnswers.com](http://www.BlackHairLossAnswers.com) and <http://DrSeymourWeaver.com>

# **Black Hair Loss Answers**

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By Seymour M. Weaver III, M.D.

## **A Special Medical Report on African American Hair Loss, Causes of Baldness and Treatment**

Flaking, itching, burning, and hair loss. Your scalp problems could be as simple as ordinary dandruff or you could be one of the thousands of African Americans at risk for permanent baldness.

In this free special medical report from Dr. Seymour M. Weaver III, a Board Certified Physician and leading expert on African American Hair care, you can learn how you may be at risk for permanent baldness and what you can do to identify, treat or even better - prevent hair loss.

Not knowing what the facts are puts you at greater risk for hair loss. Getting a diagnosis and proper treatment early can help you save your hair.

Find out the common causes of hair loss and baldness and what you can do to protect and care for your hair.

# It May Not Be Too Late To Save Your Hair

Even if you're already suffering from some form of hair loss it may not be too late to keep your hair loss from becoming permanent.

This special report has been designed and written specifically, to help you learn about the most common types of scalp conditions, diseases, and issues facing African American women today. My goal is to provide information about hair loss, what causes it and why, how to recognize a scalp disease or disorder, and when and where to seek treatment if you see a problem. I also want to let you know what you can do to prevent hair loss, and problems in the future.

There are a lot of reasons for hair loss, among them hair shaft defects, sarcoidosis, bonding glue, hot combing, chronic scratching and rubbing, morphea, post infections, and a variety of health, diet, exercise and other related problems. I'll discuss the ten most common reasons for hair loss and then ways you can help stop loss and advice on what you can do to get treatment before hair loss becomes permanent baldness.

I'm **Dr. Seymour M. Weaver, III**, M.D. I'm a board certified dermatologist with more than 25 years of experience in diagnosing and treating scalp diseases and disorders in African Americans. Outside of information provided by a variety of hair stylists and hair care experts there's been a real lack of solid, medical information about the issues and problems African American men and women face regarding their hair, health, and scalp diseases and disorders.

I hope this *Special Report*, along with my book, "*The Black Hair Medical Doctrine*," and my website and free newsletter will help more men and women recognize and get treatment for the disorders they may be experiencing. It's been my experience that many people put off getting treatment for a disorder until it's too late and their hair loss becomes permanent baldness. It doesn't have to happen to you.

[www.DrSeymourWeaver.com/](http://www.DrSeymourWeaver.com/)  
<http://DrSeymourWeaver.com>

*Free EZine and Tele-seminars*

\* This Special Report is the first in a series about hair care for the African American Community. Our reports are part of our ongoing educational information devoted to reducing scalp diseases and hair loss in the African American Community.

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## **About the Author**

Seymour M. Weaver, III, M.D.

Seymour M. Weaver, III, M.D., F.A.A.D, A.S.D.S. is one of the premier cosmetic dermatologists and surgeons in the Midwest.

As one of Houston's most respected cosmetic dermatologists and surgeons, Dr. Weaver has been a provider in breakthrough dermatological treatments, but he's done more than just provide services. His desire to educate patients, doctors, and medical students is evident in his passion for sharing knowledge.

Over the years, Dr. Weaver's practice has been a resource for numerous medical students, nursing students, and physicians in training. He has conducted multiple seminars and lectures, and has been featured in many radio and TV interviews.

A healthy body leads to a better appearance, better health for skin and hair, and increased self-confidence.

Because of that, Dr. Weaver has an esthetic treatment center, Celestial Skin International, which offers a wide range of procedures that help patients improve skin health. Celestial Skin's advanced procedures are affordable to virtually all income levels.

As a pioneer in the field of dermatology and cosmetic surgery, Dr. Weaver treats all skin types and colors, including darker skins. He takes great pride in mastering the most current treatments available.

There have been dramatic advances in dermatological surgery in procedures such as clearing birthmarks, removing unattractive leg veins, reducing wrinkles through laser surgery, and contouring bodies through new and safer LipoDissolve.

As a result of these advances, in 1995 Dr. Weaver decided to focus his practice on them. Over the last decade he has been renowned for offering the latest, most effective treatments in a safety-conscious environment where only local anesthesia is used.

With offices located in Houston, Texas, and Katy, Texas, Dr. Weaver continues to expand his practice, combining medical and esthetic services. He offers a plan for everything from acne treatments to BOTOX Cosmetic, microdermabrasions, leg vein procedures, and advanced laser technology, and LipoDissolve.

Dr. Weaver was born and grew up in Houston. He attended college at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York and received his medical degree from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

After completing a medical internship at Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center he went on to Martin Luther King, Jr. Medical Center for his three-year dermatology residency under the direction of Dr. A. Paul Kelly, M.D. at a U.C.L.A.-affiliated program.

During his time there, his training included inpatient and outpatient plastic surgery preceptorships. He also traveled to Kenya during his residency and spent a month at the Kenyatta National Hospital studying tropical dermatology and diseases.

Dr. Weaver is board certified in dermatology and a member of the following medical organizations: American Academy of Dermatology, American Society of Dermatologic Surgery, Texas Dermatological Society, Houston Dermatological Society, American Medical Association, National Medical Association, Southern Medical Association, Texas Medical Association, and the American Society for Liposuction Surgery.

He is also a board member of the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter, El Paso Branch of the The Lupus Foundation of America ([www.LupusTexas.org](http://www.LupusTexas.org)) and a financial supporter of the Cicatricial Alopecia Research Foundation ([www.carfintl.org](http://www.carfintl.org)) as well as many other medical organizations.

# The Problem

## Chapter One

**By Seymour M. Weaver, III M.D.**

More than four million men, women, and children in the United States suffer from some form of alopecia (baldness). It is not a painful disease. It is not a life-threatening disease. It does not make those who suffer from it feel sick, or ill or tired. Alopecia's power to harm comes not through the physical effects, the hair loss, and the baldness. It comes through the psychological and emotional stress and trauma it can cause its victims.

Black women, because of hairstyles and grooming and the unique qualities of African American hair, may suffer more. African American hair is different. Not better. Not worse, just different from non-African hair. It's made of the same components as non-African hair, but those components are arranged differently and must be cared for differently.

All hair is made up of the same components – the cuticle, or outer layer of the hair; the cortex, or middle layer of hair; the melanin, which is contained inside the cortex and determines the color of our hair; and the follicle, which is the name for hair before it emerges from the skin.

The difference in how these components of African American hair are structured is what causes it to be more prone to dryness and breakage. It also makes it susceptible to a wide range of diseases. Since most of us are of mixed heritage, and that doesn't just mean bi-racial, our hair can be different from that of our friends and even within our extended family.

That difference is the problem. Our hair is kinkier, which makes it harder for the oil our scalp secretes to get to the end of our hair. We have up to twice the amount of outer layer or "cuticle" as non-African hair, and though it is coarser and thicker, our hair is actually more fragile than Caucasian hair.

Finally, even on the same head, there are a variety of different hair types – from medium natural to thick natural, medium-textured, medium relaxed, wispy and the types go on. Each one, however, responds better to some hairstyles than others. All types are susceptible to diseases and trauma.

There are two reasons for hair loss in African Americans – hairstyles or hair treatments and actual medical or trauma related problems. Hair differences go beyond just the hair itself.

African Americans have a wide range of hair care options and hairstyles due to the differences in their hair. These differences may lead both men and women to experiment with or adopt certain hairstyles.

Hairstyles that involve chemical treatments – such as “relaxers” - may burn or harm the hair or hair shaft, leading to temporary or even permanent baldness.

Simple things like having hair in a ponytail, cornrows or a hairstyle that places the hair under stress (traction) can also result in damage. Hot combs, extensions and some hair care products can also damage the hair.

Fortunately African American women have dozens of hairstyles to choose from so if one style is hard on your hair, there are many others that are not. Be glad! There are a variety of styles that allow you to both enhance your beauty, and make a hectic and busy life easier by limiting the amount of time you spend on hair maintenance.

However, there can be medical consequences that you have to deal with as a consequence of one hairstyle or another. Some hairstyles can and do cause baldness. But knowing that can make a difference now, before you suffer a severe hair loss.

### **Hair Extensions**

Hair extensions are very popular. With the right extensions and some creative styling you can get a wide variety of looks for professional and casual use.

However, if you have too much tension or traction is applied to your hair in the process of attaching the extensions, you can develop a condition called Traction Folliculitis. If the tension on your hair continues for a prolonged period of time, your hair follicles can become injured and lead to other traction related problems.

Injured or damaged hair follicles can lead to scar tissue developing under the surface of the scalp. If this happens then you could develop traction alopecia, which can be a permanent form of baldness.

### **Hair Weaves**

Hair weaves can cause the same problems as hair extensions, particularly if the weaved hair is pulled tightly from the scalp.

This can lead to the formation of tiny pustules on your scalp as well as scaling and flaking, which is known as traction folliculitis. If there is prolonged tension on your hair then this can ultimately lead to a permanent type of hair loss called traction alopecia.

### **Corn Rows**

Corn rows minimize the need for daily combing and brushing. It's a popular style for college aged women, athletes, businesswomen or women who want to minimize the need for hair maintenance. And – the look itself is also popular.

For whatever reason you wear corn rows, realize that as long as the rows of braided hair are loose on your scalp there is usually little harm caused to the scalp. However, it is important for you to still shampoo and moisturize your hair to prevent it from drying out too much.

If the rows are put in too tightly, then your scalp can become irritated and lead to other problems. You will need to use medicated products either prescription or over the counter to control this condition.

### **Dreadlocks**

Dreadlocks can be very stylish and require low maintenance. You will have minimal risk for any type of hair loss or scalp irritation due to tension or traction.

One of the biggest challenges you can experience with locks is related to scaling, flaking, and itching of the scalp. This is most often due to seborrheic dermatitis, which is a condition that you inherit and it can affect up to 30% of the population.

When you have this condition, it can require frequent shampooing with or without the application of medication directly to your scalp to control the symptoms.

### **Afros**

Mother nature loves you and isn't afraid to show it. Naturally curly Afros give you a freedom of expression to show your hair as Mother Nature planned it. "Natural" means just that – hair without the risk of chemical damage or tension or traction. With that freedom your hair can just grow and grow.

If you have very thick hair or find it getting thicker as it grows, you may find it easier to manage combing and brushing by using hair moisturizers or hairdressings or sheen products. If you have the genetic predisposition to an itchy flaky scalp due to seborrheic dermatitis, you will need to use medicated products to control this condition.

### **Going Bald**

Going bald can be a negative thing if you like hair. But going bald as a hairstyle can provide you with the option to shave it all off and avoid any need to do anything to your hair. One of the most undesirable problems that you might experience as a result of opting for a bald look is the development of pustules and infection on the scalp, which is called bacterial folliculitis. This condition may be localized to one area of the scalp or it can be more generalized. You will usually develop it because your hair is shaved or cut with a very sharp razor or clippers, not because of dirty clippers.

There are a variety of medical conditions as well as hairstyles that can cause injury and destruction of hair follicles.

Some of these conditions may be associated with symptoms such as itching or irritation or soreness, but with other medical conditions you can lose hair and develop scarring without knowing that it is going on.

Sometimes you will have a bald spot or area of hair loss detected by your hair stylist that you didn't even know was there!

This intermittent or patchy bald condition has become more common over the past 10-15 years. It's usually related to more frequent practices of using hair extensions and bonding glues on the scalp.

But there are medical conditions, diseases, and bacterial or fungal infections that can cause hair loss as well. Extreme emotional or physical stress, a family history of male-pattern baldness, thyroid disorders, hormone changes associated with pregnancy or menopause, a side effect of certain medications, such as chemotherapy drugs or oral contraceptives, an iron deficiency (anemia), and malnutrition can also cause hair loss or baldness.

Only your doctor can accurately diagnose the reason for your hair loss. If you are experiencing problems with itching, flaking, pain, hair loss or any change in your scalp or hair, contact a medical professional, preferably a board certified dermatologist who specializes in hair and skin problems.

# There is More to Hair Loss Than the Word Alopecia

## Chapter Two

Talisa knew her hair was thinning. Small, dime-sized bald spots had been showing up on her scalp for quite awhile; but she wasn't too concerned until one day all her hair suddenly fell out.

"I was totally bald. I lost all of my hair at once," she said.

Devastated, she said she began to cry. Her 13-year-old daughter cried as well.

"I had to call my husband, who was out-of-town at the time," she said.

"I had to warn him about what he'd see when he got home. He thought I was exaggerating. But I wanted to prepare him."

Like millions of Americans, Talisa has a version of alopecia. Her specific diagnosis, Alopecia Areata is a hair disease that causes hair loss in smooth round patches. Talisa said she had no idea what was going on or what the problem was with her hair.

"I just knew it was thin. There was enough hair I could cover the bald spots, but I didn't think too much about it until it all fell out."

Because her hair had slowly been thinning, Talisa just put her hair in cornrows and used weaves to make it fuller.

"When I took the rows out one day last fall I just started brushing my hair and that's when it all fell out. I had no clue what was going on."

Her first appointment after she lost her hair was with a wig store; her second was with a dermatologist.

Like millions of Americans, Talisa has cicatricial alopecia. Cicatricial alopecia is a hair disease that causes hair loss.

Alopecia areata is a medical word that simply means baldness. Pronounced **al-oh-PEE-shah air-ee-ah-tah**, this disease affects thousands of people every day. Chances are you know someone who has it. If you are experiencing hair loss or you're concerned about thinning hair or balding, you may have it yourself.

Alopecia Areate is a highly unpredictable autoimmune condition that typically results in hair loss on the scalp and often on the rest of the body. It is not painful. It is not life threatening, it is not contagious, but it can bring emotional and psychological pain to those who have it.

Many people who have alopecia areata are embarrassed about their baldness and may not want to appear in public without a wig.

Talisa's story is like many of those who have the disease. It starts with one or more small, round, smooth patches on the scalp.

Most people assume the baldness is a result of hair treatments or stress. And sometimes that's true, but without a diagnosis from a physician it's hard to tell. And without treatment, what is a temporary loss can become permanent baldness.

There is hope for this condition if you get a proper diagnosis and if you are treated immediately.

Now that you have learned about the problems of rapid hair loss, alopecia, female baldness, and scalp diseases, it's time to tell you about hair loss solutions and the need to get a proper diagnosis as soon as you see any sign of thinning or hair loss.

### **There are seven key steps to a hair loss solution:**

**1. Make sure you have the right diagnosis.** Different kinds of alopecia may look alike. Getting an accurate diagnosis of the condition is important so you get the right treatment. Seek appropriate medical help at the first signs of hair loss.

**2. Be patient about your hair growing back.** Once you get a diagnosis and treatment you may notice the growth is slow. There's nothing wrong with you - hair is programmed to grow at a certain rate. That rate means it takes about 2 ½ months to grow an inch of hair. For some folks it's faster or slower.

On average it can take up to a year for six inches of hair to grow. Any treatment that causes the scalp to heal will also be followed by growth of an inch of hair every 2-½ months or so. A few lucky individuals have hair that grows quicker than this, but most of us don't. It's also normal for hair to grow faster on one side of the scalp or the other. Not everyone notices, but some do.

Some hair loss products such as topical minoxidil (Rogaine is one popular brand) can and do help hair grow. These products stimulate the growth of hair, but they don't contribute to healing any scalp diseases. Sometimes such products can actually aggravate scalp conditions associated with inflammation so it is important for the scalp to be healed before using topical minoxidil.

After your scalp has healed from various diseases these products can sometimes be used. They should not be used when there is any itching, inflammation, or irritation present on the scalp. Unfortunately, such products will not cause hair to grow in areas where scar tissue is present.

**3. Healing takes time.** Scalp infections that are bacterial or fungal usually require prescription medication by mouth for several weeks or up to two months to enable the scalp to heal. That's another reason to start treatment as early as possible. The earlier treatment is started, the better outcome is possible. If you delay treatment, that delay can cause more damage to your hair follicles.

**4. Don't scratch.** Resist the urge or tendency to try and scratch out flakes that are

associated with itchy, flaky scalp conditions or psoriasis.

While you may feel some temporary relief with the scratching, it only makes the actual condition worse.

**5. All the solutions aren't topical (stuff you place on your hair) or pill based.** A proper diet is important too. Hair is made up of protein and amino acids. B-vitamins are the building blocks for protein. That's right, eating a healthy diet or taking hair vitamins or supplements is critical to helping your body produce strong healthy hair.

**6. Consider finding a new hairstyle.** Your old hairstyle may have been your favorite for a variety of reasons – ease of maintenance, you look great in it or it suits your lifestyle. But that style won't matter if you are bald. So avoid hairstyles that put excessive tension or traction on the hair. How can you tell?

Beware of too much tension. If you start to develop bumps, scaling, or flaking with a hairstyle, that's a sign of too much tension. Different heads mean different issues. Each of us has our own unique ability to tolerate or not tolerate hairstyles with tension. Only you can tell what amount of tension your scalp can tolerate without irritation.

**7. Seek medical attention as early as possible.** Do not wait until permanent baldness has occurred to see a medical doctor. There might not be any treatment available other than a hair transplant or you may not have enough hair to use as a donor site for hair transplant surgery. The sooner you have a diagnosis the better your chances are for finding a solution or cure and saving your hair.

# **Cicatricial Alopecia – The End of the Road for Hair**

## **Chapter Four**

### **Symptoms of cicatricial alopecia**

*Symptoms of cicatricial alopecia vary from person to person. Some people have few or no symptoms, others may experience burning, itching, pain, and hair loss.*

*Don't take chances with your hair! If you experience any change in your hair or scalp that concerns you, make an appointment with a dermatologist, and have it checked out.*

*It's better to find out it's nothing than to risk being bald for life!*

It's scary and depressing and, unfortunately, it's true. Some forms of cicatricial alopecia (scarring alopecia) are the end of the road for hair and the beginning of permanent baldness.

“Cicatricial alopecia” is a general term that refers to a group of rare inflammatory disorders that destroy the hair follicle, replace it with scar tissue, and cause permanent hair loss. For many people the hair loss is gradual and they don't experience any symptoms. Other patients report severe itching and pain and find their condition progresses fairly quickly.

There are three factors - trauma, infection, and various skin diseases - any or all of which can result in scarring and bald patches.

“Trauma” to your hair isn't like trauma to the body. “Hair trauma” can be something like hair relaxers or chemicals (bleaches or dyes) left on too long, hair extensions, hot combs or hair pulled out by tight curlers or stressed caused by certain hairstyles.

Infections, including staphylococcal folliculitis or boils, animal ringworm (tinea capitis) and skin diseases like folliculitis decalvans, lichen planopilaris, frontal fibrosing alopecia, alopecia mucinosa, discoid lupus erythematosus, sarcoidosis, cicatricial pemphigoid, alopecia neoplastica, and scleroderma can also result in permanent scarring and balding. Scarring hair loss of unknown cause is known as pseudopelade.

In cicatricial alopecia, the scalp may show some redness, or an increased or decreased pigmentation, scaling, pustules even draining sinuses can be a symptom.

Cicatricial alopecia is seen in otherwise healthy men and women of all ages all over the world. There are different kinds of cicatricial alopecia and the disease is usually classified as primary or secondary cicatricial alopecia.

In primary cicatricial alopecia the disease attacks the hair follicle – usually after some sort of external injury, such as a severe infection, burns (including from lyes or chemicals used in various hair treatments), radiation from chemotherapy, or tumors.

In secondary cicatricial alopecias, the hair follicle is affected as a result of a disease process that has affected other organs and tissues. The hair follicle is damaged as a side effect of other things happening inside the body.

Some of the causes of secondary cicatricial alopecia include: Infections, both bacterial, fungal and viral; Dermatoses (dermatoses is a general term used to describe any skin defect or lesion on the skin.) Such skin defects include psoriasis and pityriasis amiantacea. Men and women both may experience a pattern hair loss, like a receding hairline, referred to as “senescent alopecia.”

Bullous disorders such as cicatricial pemphigoid or epidermolysis bullosa are a secondary form of cicatricial alopecia as are physical and chemical causes such as pressure/ischemia, heat/thermal injury, corrosive/toxic injury and traction alopecia or trichotillomania.

Commonly referred to as "trich", this is an impulse control disorder. Trichotillomania is characterized by a repeated urge to pull out scalp hair, eyelashes, facial hair, nose hair, pubic hair, eyebrows or other body hair, sometimes resulting in noticeable bald patches.

Radiation treatment, such as the treatments used for cancer, and certain kinds of drugs can also led to cicatricial alopecia. Autoimmune disorders, Scleroderma, cancers and a variety of diseases as well as certain developmental or hereditary diseases can also result in secondary cicatricial alopecia.

Although medical science recognizes some of the things that result in cicatricial alopecia, the cause of the various cicatricial Alopecias are poorly understood.

One thing is certain though: all cicatricial alopecia involves inflammation directed at the hair follicle. This inflammation is usually in the upper part of the follicle where the stem cells and the sebaceous, or oil, gland are located. Once the stem cells and the sebaceous gland are destroyed there is no possibility for the hair follicle to regenerate. Permanent hair loss results.

People of all ages and races may be affected. Cicatricial alopecias are not contagious even though there are instances of the disorder occurring in families.

Cicatricial alopecias are diagnosed by a scalp biopsy. The biopsy is necessary for an accurate diagnosis.

Things like the type of inflammation, the location and amount of inflammation and a variety of scalp changes are necessary to diagnose the type of Cicatricial alopecia, how advanced it is, and the best and most appropriate therapy.

Not everyone who has cicatricial alopecia has the same symptoms. Some people have itching, burning, pain or tenderness – all indications of ongoing activity. But others may have no symptoms and only a scalp biopsy reveals active inflammation.

Other things the doctor may do to get a diagnosis include looking at the pattern of loss, a hair “pull test” to see which areas of the scalp show areas of active disease.

In those areas the hair may be easily pulled out. Pulled hairs will also be viewed under a microscope. By doing this the doctor can determine which hairs are growing and which are resting.

If pustules are present, cultures can be performed to determine if microbes are also present and the degree to which they are contributing to the inflammation.

It’s a thorough examination and it is needed if your doctor is to make an accurate diagnosis. Because an accurate diagnosis is critical, it’s helpful to be evaluated by a dermatologist with a special interest or expertise in scalp and hair disorders.

That doctor should also be experienced in the evaluation and treatment of patients with cicatricial alopecia. Dr. Seymour Weaver is such a doctor.

You may also find other doctors in your area by contacting the American Academy of Dermatology ([www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)) or the North American Hair Research Society ([www.nahrs.org](http://www.nahrs.org)). There are additional resources at the end of this report you may find helpful.

Cicatricial alopecias can be treated with good results if diagnosed and treated in time. Treatment strategies vary according to the extent and type of cicatricial alopecia, but there are general principles for treatment. Some treatments involve anti-inflammatory medications, others may require that as well as injections into the scalp and the use of topical medications that are rubbed or massaged onto the scalp.

It’s important to understand that once the follicle has been destroyed, through scarring or disease, the hair will not grow back. If you begin treatment early and treat the inflammation in and around the hair follicles before they are destroyed, however, it is possible to halt the inflammatory process and the hair loss.

Topical treatments like Minoxidil solution (2% or 5%) applied twice daily to the scalp may be helpful to stimulate any small, remaining, unscarred follicles. It’s impossible to predict the extent of hair loss or of how much hair growth is possible with treatment.

Treatment varies from group to group and will vary from the use of anti-inflammatory medications to oral and topical antibiotics. Sometimes injections into the scalp are also used. Treatment is intended to decrease or eliminate the inflammatory cells that are destroying the hair follicle.

Your doctor may prescribe topical medications that include corticosteroids, topical tacrolimus, topical pimecrolimus, or Derma-Smoothe/FS scalp oil. He/she may also inject Triamcinolone acetonide (a corticosteroid) into inflamed, symptomatic areas of the scalp.

Oral medications you may be prescribed may include doxycycline, mycophenolate mofetil, cyclosporine, hydroxychloroquine, or corticosteroids.

Discuss any treatment with your dermatologist and learn what the treatment is expected to do. You will also want to ask your doctor to explain potential side effects of the treatment as well as laboratory tests that he'll need to do before starting treatment. Additional tests may be used to monitor the progress and success of the treatment.

It takes time. Don't get discouraged. The course of cicatricial alopecia is usually prolonged. Your treatment will last until the scalp inflammation is controlled and the progression of the scarring has been controlled.

Typically that means until all the itching, burning, pain, and tenderness are gone and your hair loss has stopped. Your doctor may want to ensure that any scalp redness, scaling and/or pustules are no longer present as well.

And while treatment may be stopped when the inflammation is gone, it's not unusual for cicatricial alopecias to re-activate after a quiet period of one or more years. If they do reactivate, treatment must be started again.

Many people may assume that surgery, such as hair transplants, are possible. The fact is surgical treatment is rarely an option.

There are certain exceptions, but not so many that you can assume your case qualifies. If the disease has been inactive for many years and the area of hair loss is small, then surgical removal of the scarred scalp and/or hair transplants may be considered for cosmetic benefit. Check with your doctor about what options are available in your case.

Cicatricial alopecia doesn't have to take over your life. Get diagnosed early. Start treatment immediately and do what your doctor prescribes. If symptoms return, go back to the doctor and don't try to self-medicate with leftover medications.

Above all, be sure to make an appointment with a dermatologist, not your stylist, at the first signs of thinning or baldness. There are many home remedies and over-the-counter treatments for many hair problems, but without a proper diagnosis you stand the risk of permanent baldness if you don't seek treatment immediately.

# Itchy, Flaky Scalp Problems That Can Drive You Mad

## Chapter Three

Nothing can drive you mad faster than an itchy, flaky scalp. Unfortunately, itchy scalps are fairly common in adults and may or may not be serious or disease related. It is estimated that one in five adults suffers from an itchy scalp. You may have anything from a common case of dandruff or something as serious as cicatricial alopecia – which can cause permanent baldness.

Seborrheic dermatitis is the most common cause of itchy, flaky scalps in adults. If you have nothing more than a few flakes of dry skin and an itch, you may have nothing more than a mild case of dandruff. If you have patches of redness or scaling along the ear, or scaling along the elbows and knees as well as your scalp, you may have more than just dandruff. People with psoriasis may have itching and scaling in areas of the body in addition to the scalp.

Other scalp conditions that may cause itching involve inflammation or a bacterial infection of the hair follicle. This condition, called folliculitis, may occur on the scalp or beard area. It generally involves pimples or scab like lesions in those areas. In the beard area those bumps are commonly called “razor bumps” and their medical name is “pseudofolliculitis barbae.”

Other bumps that may occur on the neck area are caused by bacterial infection. These bumps are called acne keloidalis nuchae, are also referred to as “hair bumps” and are most often seen in Black men, but can be seen in women.

None of these conditions are contagious. But there are itchy scalp conditions that can be spread from person to person. These contagious conditions include head lice (pediculosis capitis) and scalp ringworm (tinea capitis). Both are conditions typically seen in children but can quickly spread to adults if not treated.

Head lice infestations are very rare in African American hair, but can occur. The lice are hard to see, but the eggs (nits) can be easily seen stuck to the hair shaft and can be associated with itching. It’s usually easiest to see these on hair behind the ears or on the back of the neck.

Scalp ringworm is caused by several different fungi. It shows up in a variety of ways depending on the type of fungi and how the person’s immune system responds to the fungi.

An outbreak can range from a bald patch of broken off hair, a few pimples or scaly patches, to large areas of swelling, pus, and baldness.

Other causes of itchy scalp are reactions to skin or hair care products, shampooing too often, using hot water (which may dry the skin) under washing or washing infrequently. Weather, exercise, and allergies may also cause itching and flaking. Only a doctor can diagnose the cause of your itching and flaking. If the itching and flaking occurs after you change hair care products, or with a change in exercise or weather, you may want to see if changing back to your old routine makes a difference.

Have you had more stress in your life recently? Stress is a leading cause of itchy scalp. Some medical experts believe when the body is “stressed out,” the immune system can be affected and your immune resistance lowered. A lowered immune resistance can set the stage for the over-colonization of a yeast organism called *Pityrosporum ovale* – which is normally found on the scalp.

Stress can produce above-normal counts of this yeast – resulting in itching and flaking. Many people will try home remedies, like apple cider vinegar or other rinses, over-the-counter medications or homeopathic remedies.

While home remedies and over-the-counter medications may help temporarily, if the condition persists you should make an appointment with a dermatologist for a medical diagnosis. Remember, delay in getting treatment for a serious condition may result in permanent baldness.

## Itchy, flaking scalp?

*How can you tell if you have dandruff or a more serious condition? If your scalp has recently started itching because of a change in your hair care products, hairstyle, diet, stress, the weather, exercising, travel or headgear, you may be experiencing a reaction to your environment. If the condition persists, or is painful, you notice hair loss, redness, swelling, pustules, scabbing or more than just a few flakes of dry skin - see a doctor.*

***You may save your hair!***

It's a very common condition; but many people don't understand what's happening

with their scalp when they see and feel the signs of neurodermatitis.

If you can imagine an itch so intense that no amount of scratching brings relief you can imagine what neurodermatitis might be like.

Neurodermatitis is a common form of eczema, which develops when the nerve endings in your skin become irritated.

The irritation can trigger an itch-scratch-itch cycle that can lead to thickening in the skin (see photo far right). Common causes of nerve irritation can be as simple as insect bites, dry skin, too tight clothing and emotional stress.

Signs and Symptom include intensely itchy skin. Skin that itches most when the person is relaxing, resting or trying to sleep may be neurodermatitis.

Most itchiness resolves when the skin is scratched, but with neurodermatitis, once the skin is scratched, a vicious itch-scratch-itch cycle develops. Once the cycle begins, the worse it gets.

The more the skin is scratched, rubbed, or even touched, the more the itch intensifies. The itchy area is most commonly on the lower legs, ankles, wrists, forearms and the back and sides of the neck. In the beginning the constant scratching can cause small, well-defined, scaly, reddish plaques but over time the constant scratching causes the skin to thicken and darken. Lines in the skin may become more prominent. When the skin becomes very thick, it sometimes develops a grayish hue.

Many cases begin in mid-to-late adulthood, with most cases developing between 30 and 50 years of age. While it can be maddening, it can also be treated and must be, because neurodermatitis remains until it is effectively treated. Since effective treatment requires the person to stop scratching, the condition can be a challenge to treat. With exposure to certain triggers, neurodermatitis can return.

# Glossary and Additional Resources

## Appendix

**Cicatricial Alopecia:** The term cicatricial alopecia refers to a diverse group of rare disorders that destroy the hair follicle, replace it with scar tissue, and cause permanent hair loss, which results in baldness.

**Cuticle:** This is the outer layer of the hair. Thin and colorless, the cuticle is made up of layers of scales, which interlock with the cells of the hair's inner root sheath to firmly anchor it in the follicle. The cuticle layer of African American hair can be twice the thickness of that of Caucasian hair.

**Cortex:** This is the middle layer of the hair. The cortex is made up of cells, which are tightly bound around one another. These bands of cells give hair its elasticity and strength. As a result of their makeup, cortex cells are very receptive to chemicals and can be damaged by dyes and chemical treatments.

**Dermatoses:** Dermatoses is a general term used to describe any skin defect or lesion on the skin.

**Dermatologist:** A dermatologist is a doctor who specializes in treating conditions that affect the skin, hair, and nails. After earning a medical degree and completing an internship, a dermatologist receives three more years of specialty medical training to become an expert dedicated to skin, hair, and nails.

Many dermatologists have general practices and see patients with all types of skin concerns. Some dermatologists gain additional training and expertise in a specific area of dermatology, such as pediatrics, surgery, or cosmetics. They may go on to have a practice that specializes in one of these areas.

**Follicle:** This is actually the name for hair before it emerges from the skin. Often referred to as the “root” of the hair, follicles are actually composed of many elements, including carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. Making sure you have enough of these elements in your diet can improve the condition of the hair and its appearance.

**Melanin:** This substance is contained in the cortex and is what determines the color of our hair and skin. The more melanin a person has, the darker the hair or skin color.

# Glossary and Additional Resources

For more information about cicatricial alopecia visit their website for the Cicatricial Alopecia Research Foundation ([www.CARFintl.com](http://www.CARFintl.com)). CARF is an organization that has been created to help support research and find a cure for this problematic condition.

**American Academy of Dermatology (AAD)** at [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)

**Alopecia Areata Foundation** at [www.naaf.org](http://www.naaf.org)

**Dermatology Nurses' Association** at [www.dnanurse.org](http://www.dnanurse.org)

**National Organization for Rare Disorders, Inc. (NORD)** at [www.rarediseases.org](http://www.rarediseases.org)

**North American Hair Research Society (NAHRS)** at [www.nahrs.org](http://www.nahrs.org)