

Androgenetic alopecia

Description

Androgenetic alopecia is a common form of hair loss in both men and women. In men, it is also known as male pattern baldness, and in women, it is also known as female pattern hair loss.

In men, hair is lost in a well-defined pattern, beginning above both temples. Over time, the hairline moves back (recedes) to form a characteristic "M" shape. Hair also thins at the top of the head (vertex or crown), often progressing to partial or complete baldness.

The pattern of hair loss in women differs from male-pattern baldness. In women, the hair becomes thinner at the top of the head, and the middle part widens. The hairline does not typically recede. Androgenetic alopecia in women rarely leads to total baldness.

Androgenetic alopecia in men has been associated with several other medical conditions, including coronary heart disease and enlargement of the prostate. Additionally, prostate cancer, disorders of insulin resistance (such as diabetes and obesity), and high blood pressure (hypertension) have been related to androgenetic alopecia.

In women, this form of hair loss is associated with an increased risk of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). PCOS is characterized by a hormonal imbalance that can lead to irregular menstruation, acne, excess hair elsewhere on the body (hirsutism), and weight gain.

Frequency

Androgenetic alopecia affects an estimated 50 million men and 30 million women in the United States. Androgenetic alopecia can start as early as a person's teens, and the risk increases with age; more than 50 percent of men over age 50 have some degree of hair loss. In women, hair loss is most likely after menopause.

Causes

A variety of genetic and environmental factors likely play a role in causing androgenetic alopecia. Although researchers are studying risk factors that may contribute to this condition, most of these factors remain unknown. Researchers have determined that

this form of hair loss, particularly in men, is related to hormones called androgens, specifically an androgen called dihydrotestosterone (DHT). Androgens play a role in female pattern hair loss, but other factors that are not yet known are also involved.

Androgens are important for normal male sexual development before birth and during puberty. Androgens also have other important functions in both males and females, such as regulating hair growth and sex drive.

Hair growth begins under the skin in structures called follicles. Each strand of hair normally grows for 2 to 6 years, goes into a resting phase for several months, and then falls out. The cycle starts over when the follicle begins growing a new hair.

Androgens help control this cycle. However, too much stimulation of hair follicles by androgens may lead to a shorter growth period, resulting in shorter and thinner strands of hair. The growth of new hair to replace strands that are shed is also delayed. Together, these changes lead to hair thinning or loss.

Researchers suspect that variants (also called mutations) in several genes play a role in androgenetic alopecia. However, scientific studies have confirmed only that variations in one gene, the *AR* gene, are involved in this condition. The *AR* gene provides instructions for making a protein called an androgen receptor. Androgen receptors allow the body to respond appropriately to DHT and other androgens. Studies suggest that variations in the *AR* gene result in androgen receptors that are more easily stimulated by androgens than normal, leading to increased activity of the receptors in hair follicles. It remains unclear, however, how these genetic changes increase the risk of hair loss in men and women with androgenetic alopecia.

Researchers continue to investigate the connection between androgenetic alopecia and other medical conditions, such as coronary heart disease and prostate cancer in men and polycystic ovary syndrome in women. They believe that some of these disorders may be associated with elevated androgen levels, which may help explain why they tend to occur with androgen-related hair loss.

[Learn more about the gene associated with Androgenetic alopecia](#)

- *AR*

Inheritance

The inheritance pattern of androgenetic alopecia is unclear, because many genetic and environmental factors are likely to be involved. This condition tends to cluster in families, however, and having a close relative with patterned hair loss appears to be a risk factor for developing the condition.

Other Names for This Condition

- Androgenic alopecia
- Female pattern baldness

- Female-pattern hair loss
- Male pattern alopecia
- Male pattern hair loss
- Male-pattern baldness
- Pattern baldness

Additional Information & Resources

Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center

- Androgenetic alopecia (<https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/9269/index>)

Patient Support and Advocacy Resources

- National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) (<https://rarediseases.org/>)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Androgenetic alopecia%22>)

Catalog of Genes and Diseases from OMIM

- ALOPECIA, ANDROGENETIC, 1; AGA1 (<https://omim.org/entry/109200>)
- ALOPECIA, ANDROGENETIC, 2; AGA2 (<https://omim.org/entry/300710>)
- ALOPECIA, ANDROGENETIC, 3; AGA3 (<https://omim.org/entry/612421>)

Scientific Articles on PubMed

- PubMed (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%28Alopecia%5BMAJR%5D%29+AND+%28%28androgenetic+alopecia%5BTIAB%5D%29+OR+%28androgenic+alopecia%5BTIAB%5D%29+OR+%28female+pattern+baldness%5BTIAB%5D%29+OR+%28male+pattern+alopecia%5BTIAB%5D%29+OR+%28male+pattern+baldness%5BTIAB%5D%29+OR+%28pattern+baldness%5BTIAB%5D%29%29+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+human%5Bmh%5D+AND+%22last+720+days%22%5Bdp%5D>)

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