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Balding? See a dentist

Last updated: Tuesday, November 27, 2007

There is a close relationship between infection outbreaks on teeth and the presence of alopecia areata or localised alopecia, a type of hair loss which has an unknown origin.

Alopecia areata starts with bald patches on the scalp, and sometimes elsewhere on the body. The disease occurs in males and females of all ages, and experts believe that it affects 1 out of 1000 people.

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Research by professors José Antonio Gil Montoya and Antonio Cutando Soriano, of the at the University of Granada, advises going to the dentist when patients notice localised hair loss, to have their oral health examined.

"Alopecia areata is a dermatitis which presents the following signs: The typical pattern is for one or more round bald patches to appear on the scalp, in the beard, or in the eyebrows, or to undergo a loss of eyelashes. Alopecia areata is thought to be an autoimmune disease," stated the researchers. Hair re-grows in most patients after several months. However, in a quarter of all patients the condition recurs once or more. According to professors at the UGR, the affected hair follicles are not totally destroyed. Therefore, hair can grow back, although patients who have already suffered from alopecia areata may have recurrences.

Unpredictable development

Frequently, patients with alopecia areata have hairs with the shape of an exclamation mark on the border of the bald patch. Hairs become weak and fall out easily. Several studies suggest that alopecia areata has unpredictable development: sometimes hair grows back within a few weeks, but in some cases the disease progresses and can cause further hair loss on scalp and body.

Until the research at the UGR, which establishes for the first time a relationship between alopecia areata and dental disease, the origin of this kind of hair loss was not well known. Hair-follicle tissue inflames without cicatrisation and, in alopecia areata, the affected hair follicles are mistakenly attacked by the immune system. Some of the factors that cause alopecia are: genetics, family history of alopecia, non-specific immune reactions, specific auto-immune reactions of certain organs and emotional stress.

"We have found that bald patches caused by tooth infection are not always in the same place. They normally appear on a line projected from the dental infection and can thus can be located on the face at the level of the maxillary teeth, above a line through the lip-angle to the scalp, beard, or even to the eyebrow. Nevertheless, they can also be located far from infection outbreak." Explained Gil Montoya and Cutando Soriano. - (EurekAlert!)

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