

Baldness hard to deal with especially if person is a woman

I have never understood what the big deal was. I didn't care that my friend was bald - after all - it is just hair.

But the extent to which her disease - called Alopecia Areata - bothers her and the majority of people who have it, there obviously is a big deal.

"To me, going bald is more embarrassing than striping in front of someone," said Cathy Frost, an Alopecia Areata sufferer. "Everyone has a body, going bald in front of people is showing a part of your body that no one has ever seen before."

Because Alopecia is non-life threatening, finding a cure isn't a priority.

In fact, not much is known about the disease or the cause of it.

Doctors think Alopecia Areata is an autoimmune disorder where "the body is attacking its own hair. It thinks it's a foreign object."

The disease occurs most often in children, especially those reaching puberty.

Quarter-sized patches of hair loss

Most people notice something is wrong when quarter-sized bald patches start to appear on their head.

Depending on the extent of the hair loss, either it grows back or it's gone for life.

There are two other forms of Alopecia - Totalis - when all hair disappears from the head and Universalis where all body hair including eye brows, eye lashes, nose hair and body hair falls out. (One per cent of the population has some form of Alopecia Areata. One per cent of that number has Alopecia Universalis.)

And Frost is one of them. Frost first noticed small bald patches when she was pregnant six-years-ago.

When she went for her three-month appointment, her doctor knew something wasn't right and sent her to a dermatologist.

Six months later, she linked up with AASIST (Alopecia Areata Support & Information Service of Toronto). The group discussed how to cope with the disease, how to purchase a wig and other cosmetic strategies.

"It helped me meet someone else in my position. They knew how I felt and how to cope with it."

But for Frost, her disease is more than a cosmetic concern, it's also a health issue.

Without eyelashes, there is nothing to stop the glare from the sun and dirt from getting into her eyes.

"I have to lather on the sunscreen

because I don't have the extra protection."

And the same hair that is on her head is also found in her nails - causing them to lose luster, get dints, large lines and sometimes, they fall out altogether.

Changed her life

When Frost went back to teaching, she didn't want anyone to know she was bald. She wore a wig for two years before "coming out."

"You have to remember you never see a bald woman. (I was afraid) everyone would stare and the high school kids would laugh. ... I did an

Alopecia awareness day. I told all my classes (about the disease). ... And out of 90 students only one kid ask me if there were treatments. I was so surprised. All the things you imagine ... drawing pictures on the chalk board, calling out 'hey, baldy'. I was amazed how people don't really care.

"People aren't going to notice what you look like, they don't have time." Frost said she put more stress on herself by keeping her disease a secret.

But she stressed, every sufferer is different.

It takes a long time for people to 'come out.' For some, they wear their wig to bed to please their husbands, for others their immediate family does not even know.



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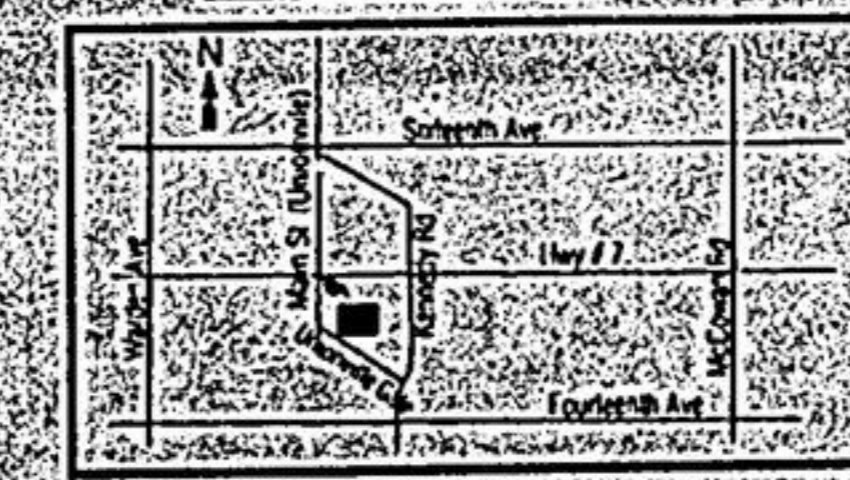
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"I don't tell people to go bald in public, they have to do whatever they feel comfortable. It takes a long time for people to come (out). Some people never do."

Some wear their wig to bed to please their husbands, others, their immediate family does not even know.

The worst part is the loss of control.

"I never really cared about my looks. (When I lost my hair) I felt I needed to wear makeup. I lost control of how I lived my life. For others it's major loss of control. It's hard to swim in a wig."


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- by Lisa Cartwright

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