

# Sometimes hair loss in women can point to bigger health issues

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Hair loss can be devastating for women, but the condition can also signal

additional health problems.

An American Academy of Dermatology expert offers information about the types of hair loss seen in women with darker skin tones, common types of [medical conditions](#) associated with hair loss and [treatment options](#).

"Research shows that women who experience hair loss can also have other medical conditions like diabetes, acne and [breast cancer](#)," said [Dr. Valerie Callender](#), professor of dermatology at Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C.

"By recognizing the signs of hair loss and seeing your dermatologist as soon as possible, you may be able to limit the progression, hold on to the hair you have, and discover any other underlying medical conditions you may have," she said in an academy news release.

One condition—central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia (CCCA)—causes hair loss in the center of the scalp. This is the most common type of hair loss seen in women with darker skin tones, affecting nearly 15% of Black women.

Early detection is important because CCCA can cause scarring by destroying hair follicles. Once the hair follicle scars completely, regrowth becomes difficult and hair loss can be permanent.

A dermatologist can diagnose this condition and work on a treatment plan, which can include antibiotics, topical steroid medication or corticosteroid injections, offering pain relief and freedom from itching. It can also prevent scarring from getting worse.

Breast cancer, [high cholesterol](#), diabetes and high blood pressure are common among Black women with CCCA, Callender said. A

dermatologist may be able to provide a woman with information on whether the hair loss may be symptom of another disease.

Female pattern hair loss is also common, affecting millions of women of all skin tones.

With this hereditary condition, the hair thins mainly on the top of the scalp. It usually starts with a widening of the center hair part. Many women with female pattern hair loss also have acne because of increased hormones, Callender said. Menopause and [high blood pressure](#) are also common as female pattern hair loss progresses.

A possible treatment for this is minoxidil, which can reduce hair loss, stimulate hair growth and strengthen existing strands of hair. You can buy products containing this at the drug store, but a dermatologist may be able to provide you with a higher dosage available with a prescription.

Hairstyles that tightly pull the hair can cause traction alopecia, which is common in women with darker skin tones due to hair styling.

"One of the first things I ask my patients who have a history of braids is if it hurts when their hair is braided," Callender said. "Getting your hair done shouldn't hurt, so if they have pain, it's an indicator that they could be developing traction alopecia."

A person can still maintain a sense of style, but with a looser 'do or by avoiding frequent use of styles that pull hair.

Ingredients in hair products are also important, Callender said. While [women](#) with darker skin tones, particularly those of African descent, have hair that tends to be coarse, dry and fragile, some shampoos for dandruff and other scalp disorders can further dry out hair, leading to breakage. Shampoos and hair products should contain ingredients that

moisturize hair such as vitamins A and E, jojoba oil and shea butter.

"When treatments are not effective to prevent hair loss, a permanent solution is to consider a hair transplant, which creates natural-looking results," Callender said. "Hair transplants are most effective in patients with traction alopecia and female pattern hair loss. While patients with CCCA aren't always ideal candidates for a hair transplant due to scarring, it is possible for them to have success. A board-certified dermatologist can determine if a [hair](#) transplant is the right option."

Callender is scheduled to make a presentation on [hair loss](#) at a meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology, in New Orleans, March 17-21.

**More information:** The *Journal of the American Medical Association* has more on common causes of [hair loss](#).

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