

Danielle Bear, 28, accepts that being bald can be beautiful.....

Growing up, Danielle Bear had thick healthy hair, something every girl wants. At 18, a trip to the hairdresser's revealed her "worst fears had come true." "I was talking to the hairdresser when she said, 'do you know that you have alopecia?'" recalls Danielle.

"She held up a mirror to the back of my head and showed me a bald patch. I thought, 'Oh no, anything but this.'" "My mum got alopecia after I was born and she lost all her hair. I thought it was hereditary and I secretly feared I might get it." A few years ago it was discovered that a great-grandfather also suffered from Alopecia.



Danielle went to the doctor, who told her that there was no cure and only a handful of treatments with no guarantee of success. "I was not interested in taking steroids as I had seen the effect that they had on my mum". "The Dermatologist advised me to get a wig and that was it – I had no emotional support."

At the time of diagnosis Danielle had been living and studying at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, NSW with no family close by to support her.

Danielle steadily lost her hair in patches until she caught glandular fever three years later, when she lost it all – including her eyelashes and eyebrows – in three months.

"I didn't even recognise myself, she says." "I'd lost all my femininity."

Danielle found it hard talking about what she was going through. "I felt like talking about it would make it real," says Danielle. "And I didn't want Mum to feel guilty about possibly passing it on to me."

Danielle became a shadow of her former self, as she struggled to come to terms with her appearance.

"I was at uni and should have been having fun – but my confidence hit rock bottom," she says. "Wigs made my head hot and I'd spend ages drawing on eyebrows, and then checking that they hadn't rubbed off."

"I was so paranoid; I couldn't go out with my friends. I felt so alone."

Danielle feared that no one would find her attractive – until she met Woody, 27, two years later.

"I hid my hair loss under my wigs, but three months later I knew I had to tell him. I said, 'There's something you need to know,' and burst into tears. He replied, 'I know, but you should have told me sooner.'"

With Woody's support, Danielle started to rebuild her shattered confidence, but she still didn't feel comfortable showing him her bald head. "I'd wear a beanie in bed," reveals Danielle. "He'd call me his 'beanie girl!'"

Then three years later, Danielle's hair started to grow back. "It was a real shock," Says Danielle. "I started to feel like me again".

Within a few months Danielle noticed her Alopecia was returning in small patches. For the next 18 months she managed to cover them up with different hairstyles until they became one large patch which was too hard to cover over – and this time she decided enough was enough. "I decided to take control and shave my hair off," Says Danielle. "I told Woody and he said, 'Okay I'll shave my head, too,' so we went to the hairdressers together. I was nervous, but Woody said I looked beautiful. It was the bravest thing I've ever done."

Danielle started wearing coloured headscarves, which she loves – but admits daring to be bald has its down sides. "Strangers ask if I have cancer," she says, "Which is really upsetting."

"Woody and I have been together for five years and he's a godsend," says Danielle. "He shaves my head and says I look beautiful..

It took Danielle 10 years to come to terms with her hair loss. Her biggest issue is that she wasn't offered any counselling. She feels that having Alopecia has a psychological impact and so emotional support needs to be given.

Despite that, Danielle is now looking positively to the future and is finally accepting that you can be bald and beautiful.



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