

Jane — I decided to make friends with Alopecia. ...I believe that talking about Alopecia Areata more and revealing our patchy and bald heads is the way forward.



I was once so proud of my dark shiny hair. I had so much of it. I would often complain in summer how thick and hot it was. How ironic this seems these days.

After years of living with Alopecia Areata, I've learnt that losing my hair is only one part of the condition. The toughest part is its unpredictability and the distress it causes. My latest episode with Alopecia began five years ago. Within months, I had countless patches of loss. My hair was falling out and there was nothing that I could do about it. I entered a new world, a world where I remained powerless.

I felt I had lost my identity. I didn't feel attractive. My confidence diminished. I always felt like something was missing in my life. I couldn't even look at an image of myself without cringing at the sight of a patchy hairline. I was ashamed I even felt this way about myself. I had this internal battle with wanting desperately to achieve self-acceptance, whilst trying to come to terms with the emotional complexities of Alopecia. Alopecia took away the pleasure of having hair and essentially I felt I had to get to know myself again.

After years of watching one patch form whilst another filled in, the celebration of my hair returning no longer resonated within me. I have accepted that Alopecia is now a part of my life. I no longer repeat the affirmation "I have thick lustrous rapidly growing hair" 20 times whilst shampooing. Nor do I feel alarmed when peering down at the bathroom floor covered in my dark brown strands. I no longer visit natural therapists to try and bring back my full head of hair. Those days are over.

Instead, I decided to make friends with Alopecia. I decided that since we were going to be living together indefinitely that I would benefit from building a healthy relationship with the condition. This seemed like my only alternative to be free of the emotional torment it brought to my life. I shifted my energy from longing for a full head of hair, to focusing on being comfortable with who I am, despite my appearance. I didn't want to let it defeat me. I wanted to take charge.

During this time, I watched Michelle Law in her TEDX talk on youtube. I was so moved by her story and on this particular day I shared my own story on my business Facebook page. To a degree, I felt that I was hiding under my hat and needed to tell the world why. Not only for my own sense of healing, but for the benefit of community awareness. I felt empowered at that very moment. How you feel about yourself and how you present to the world is such a significant part of life. Being comfortable with myself is all I want to achieve when it comes to Alopecia.

After this long, I have made peace with the fact that my chances of having a full head of hair again are somewhat low. I no longer fear it. My aim is just to go with it. Today, I am accustomed to the way I look with Alopecia. My biggest challenge is embracing it wholeheartedly by introducing myself to the world without a full head of hair. Admittedly, my healing process is slow. However, I am making it happen by setting myself small challenges. My latest was entertaining our neighbour (who knew nothing about my condition) without my hat on and without feeling self-conscious. It sounds small, but it was big to me.

From my experience, I believe that talking about Alopecia Areata more and revealing our patchy and bald heads is the way forward. It helps society become familiar with Alopecia Areata. It helps us feel understood. More importantly, it helps us feel like we can confidently walk out the door knowing that we have embraced who we are without a full head of hair.



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