

## Laura....as women we often stress so much about our appearance when in reality it is only us that is noticing a change.

My Alopecia journey began when I was 18 years old. I am now 21. This condition has taken me on such a journey in the past three years, and although at times it was difficult, I truly believe it has made me a better person. Rather than destroy my confidence, my alopecia has made me more confident than ever. I am no longer vain, am no longer obsessed with my appearance, I am proud of who I am, hair or no hair!

My first bout of Alopecia Areata began when I had just started university. I decided to have a go at dying my shoulder-length hair at home by myself with a pharmacy brand hair dye, with devastating effects. My hair quickly began to fall out, I would wake up each morning having to scrape it off my pillow, I would constantly have to brush away strands off the table when I went out to lunch with my friends. I had absolutely no idea what was happening to me, I had never heard of the word Alopecia before. As a savvy law student I even began drafting a strongly-worded letter to the hair dye company, blaming them for this awful turn of events. In the midst of this I booked an appointment with a dermatologist. When he confirmed that I had Alopecia, it was a relief to put a name to what was happening to me, but at the same time devastating to know that this was now a part of my life for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, I remained as positive as I could throughout the process. I lost practically all of my hair, and switched to wigs soon after. What amazed me is that hardly anyone realised! I went from short red hair, to a lovely long blonde wig, and my friends just thought I got extensions! It made me realise that as women we often stress so much about our appearance when in reality it is only us that is noticing a change.

When my patches finally grew in after a year, I tossed the wig away (I think I really ended up resenting it...it was always such a hassle). I began to rock a (very) short hairstyle. I finally felt free! I started being much more open about my disease, I would explain to anyone who would listen about why my hair was suddenly so short. It began to grow back into a cute bob. Everything was going so well.

Then it all came crashing down once again. About 6 months after it all grew back, it began to fall out again. As positive as I was during the my first bout, I really found it so much more difficult the second time around, mostly because I knew I hadn't beaten the disease. I know there is no cure, but I desperately wished and prayed it would only happen to me once, and I felt like all that wishing and praying had gone unanswered. I developed some pretty severe anxiety surrounding my hair, and was beginning to feel rather hopeless, the crazy mood swings that accompanied my steroid medication didn't help either! I ended up seeing a counsellor who I worked with to develop some coping strategies for my anxiety; I was worried

about something that I had already conquered in the past. And you know what, in the end, not too much fell out anyway. All that incessant worrying was for nothing!

Now, in the last few months, my hair has once again started falling out for the third time. But this time I am 100% ready for it. In fact, if it does all fall out, I'm even excited about what new wig I will choose! Or perhaps I will go bald for the first time! I have accepted that Alopecia is part of me now, and I'm glad to be part of the supportive Alopecia family. We are all in this together, and we are all beautiful, hair or no hair.



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