

ALOPECIA, YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

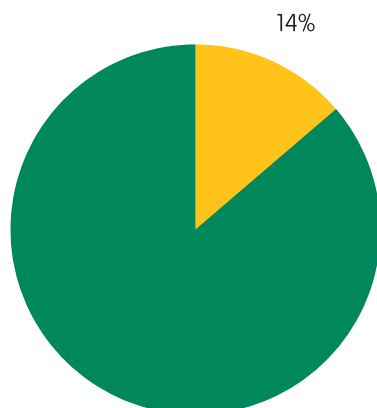
An Information Sheet for Young People Living with Alopecia Areata

Mental health problems are common, especially for young people. When mental health problems impact your everyday life and last more than a few weeks, it can be a sign that it may be time to seek help.

Almost 50% of Australians will experience a mental illness at some point in their life. Depression and anxiety disorders are the most common. People with Alopecia Areata may be more likely to experience mental health problems.

It is important to remember that Alopecia Areata does not cause mental health conditions. However, losing your hair or living with hair loss can be a stressful or emotional time.

Learning about mental health can help us identify when something is not right and develop coping strategies to help.



As many of 14% of young Australians will experience a mental health disorder.



What are some of the most common mental illnesses in young people?

Anxiety:

It is normal, and in fact healthy, to feel some stress or worry when dealing with everyday problems. Anxiety disorders occur when these feelings persist over time or cause difficulties with day to day life. Anxiety is the most common mental health concern in Australia. It affects two million Australians every year, and more than half a million young people.



Depression:

Depression affects an individual's thoughts, feelings, energy levels and behaviour. It often involves feelings of hopelessness, sadness, exhaustion, irritability or emptiness. When these feelings last for several weeks or longer, it may be depression. There are many different types of depression and it is different for each person. For example, some people may have trouble sleeping and no appetite, while others may be exhausted and sleep and eat much more than normal.



What do Anxiety and Depression look like in teens with Alopecia Areata?

We all go through difficult times and have challenging emotions. Everyone experiences relationship issues, work and study stress, or simply feeling low. It is normal to experience difficult emotions when dealing with hair loss. You might feel things like loss, grief, anger, helplessness or loneliness. You may also hear misinformed or upsetting comments from others about your hair loss, which can be distressing.



So how can you know when a rough time might be a sign of mental illness?

If difficult feelings impact your day-to-day life and last for a few weeks or more, it may be a sign that you are experiencing mental illness.

It is important to remember that you don't need to have a mental illness to seek support. Support services are available for any level of care you need. You should not feel that you need to wait until it gets "bad enough" to reach out.



Physical Changes

Examples:

- A racing heart rate or faster breathing
- Tension and aches (especially in shoulders and neck) or headaches
- Low energy or tiredness
- Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much and not feeling rested
- Changes in diet and eating habits

Changes in thoughts and feelings

Examples:

- Being irritable or angry with friends or family
- Feeling tense, restless, stressed or worried
- Feeling sad or down for long periods of time
- Feeling hopeless and negative
- Having a hard time concentrating or remembering things

Changes in Activity

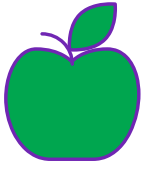
Examples:

- Not enjoying or not wanting to be involved in things you would normally enjoy
- Risky behaviour you would normally avoid
- Unusual sleeping or eating habits, or substance use
- Crying at sudden or random periods
- Not being able to get things done



What can you do?

There are lots of things we can do to help take care of our mental health.



Looking after our bodies can help with general health and wellbeing:

- Eat well to make sure your body is getting everything it needs
- Sleep well to help your brain and body rest
- Get moving to help you sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood
- Avoid, or at least limit your use of, alcohol and other drugs



Healthy relationships can also help us manage tough times:

- Stay connected with friends
- Share your feelings with someone you're close to and trust
- Try to stay involved in activities you love, like sport or arts
- Connect with an alopecia support group or reach out to a support ambassador



There are also lots of tools people use to manage their feelings and cope with difficult emotions:

- Journaling can help you to process your feelings
- Meditation to calm a busy mind
- Practising mindfulness and gratitude can help you be in the moment.



If you need to reach out to find someone to talk to, there are lots of places to turn to.

- Your doctor can talk to you about a mental health care plan and refer you to a proper mental health support service.
- Your school or university may have services available for free or at discounted rates.
- Phoneline or web-chat based mental health services, such as eheadspace, BeyondBlue or Lifeline.
- A trusted friend or family member can help support you through this process.

Some places to start looking are listed below.

- **Beyond Blue**

www.beyondblue.org.au

- **Kids Help Line**

www.kidshelpline.com.au

- **ReachOut**

www.reachout.com.au

- **Headspace**

www.headspace.org.au

- **Lifeline**

www.lifeline.org.au

Alopecia Areata can feel very isolating, especially if you don't know anyone else living with this condition. AAAF run online support groups, including a specific group for young people. These are a supportive environment to ask questions, connect with others or vent feelings in a friendly setting.

For more, visit www.aaaf.org.au

