



HOW IS ALOPECIA AREATA DIAGNOSED?

Diagnosis at a Glance

- Alopecia Areata is usually diagnosed clinically, meaning by a doctor's examination, not by lab tests.
- A dermatologist looks for characteristic signs such as round or oval bald patches and healthy-looking skin.
- The presence of short "exclamation mark" hairs (thinner at the base) often confirms the diagnosis.
- In most cases, no biopsy or blood test is required.
- Doctors diagnose Alopecia Areata by what they see, not by what they find under a microscope.

Sources:

- Epidemiology and burden of alopecia areata: a systematic review. CCID. (2015). [Link](#)
- Alopecia Areata: An Updated Review for 2023. JCMS. (2023). [Link](#)



WHAT DOCTORS CHECK

- Pattern of hair loss — circular or patchy areas are typical.
- Scalp condition — smooth, unscarred skin (not scaly or inflamed).
- Nail changes — small pits or ridges may be present in some patients.
- Other autoimmune signs — if suspected, doctors may check thyroid function or related conditions.

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ADDITIONAL TESTS (IF NEEDED)

- A scalp biopsy may be done if diagnosis is uncertain, it shows inflammation around hair follicles.
- Trichoscopy (scalp magnification) helps identify exclamation mark hairs and black dots.
- Blood tests may be ordered if an underlying autoimmune disease is suspected (e.g., thyroid disease, lupus, or vitiligo).
- These tests confirm autoimmune involvement and rule out other causes of hair loss (like infections or hormones).

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Alopecia Areata is diagnosed mainly by visual assessment and medical history.
- A dermatologist can often identify it in a single visit.
- Biopsies or lab tests are only used when the pattern is unclear or other conditions are suspected.
- Early diagnosis helps rule out other causes and begin treatment or support sooner.
- If in doubt, see a dermatologist. Simple observation often provides the answer.

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Quick Facts Box

Fact	Information	Source
Main method	Clinical examination by dermatologist	JCMS (2023)
Biopsy needed?	Rarely. Only for uncertain cases	CCID (2015)
Common clues	Round patches, exclamation hairs, smooth skin	JCMS (2023)
Additional tests	Thyroid, autoimmune screening if indicated	CCID (2015)
Other tools	Trichoscopy, biopsy, lab tests (case-dependent)	JCMS (2023)

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Learn more about Alopecia Areata, treatment options, and real-life stories at aaaf.org.au

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