

SELF

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TRENDING
By Korin Miller

This Model Is Embracing Her Alopecia—And Showing Off An Amazing Wig In The Process

Lara Kitchen, 20, lost her hair due to alopecia. She posted an Instagram video featuring herself without a wig to prove she's not ashamed, and with one to show how incredible wigs can be these days.



A model in Australia who lives with hair loss due to alopecia is hoping to raise awareness of the autoimmune disease. Lara Kitchen, 20, recently posted an Instagram video showing herself with and without a wig—and it's been viewed more than 43,000 times in one day. "Doing this is the scariest thing I have ever done in my entire life," Kitchen writes in the caption of the video, which starts to the tune of Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful" and shows Kitchen with words like "acceptance" and "brave" written on her face. She details how she began losing her hair in clumps when she was 14, and it greatly impacted her upbringing. Kitchen says she became "the girl that 'wore a wig,'" and rumors went around that she had cancer.

Her parents took her to several doctors until one finally diagnosed her with alopecia. "I remember sitting there and just crying in the doctor's office and taking my wig off as he looked at my head and began to tell me and my mum that the follicle off the hair was still there, but the chances of it growing back were slim," she writes. She underwent treatments to try to help her hair grow back, but nothing worked, and she has worn wigs ever since. As you can see in the below video, Kitchen has found human-hair wigs that look gorgeous—and like hair that grew out of her own head—in various styles.

Kitchen says she hasn't been open about her condition until now, but she's realized she has nothing to be ashamed of. "Yes, my hair is a major physical aspect to my appearance, but my friends and family love me for me," she said.

Doing this is was the scariest thing I have ever done in my entire life and something I don't speak about to anyone! So a little story to get this all started When I was 14 I started to loose my hair in clumps and as you can imagine being a 14 year old girl starting high school with new people, you want to make a good impression but for me I became and felt like I was the girl that "wore a wig" or as nasty rumors went around such as "I had cancer" and these words were spread not just through my own school but through other school and already suffering anxiety made things very tough. My parents had no Idea what was going on, why was I loosing my hair? We saw doctor after doctor and some said stress and then one of perths top dermatologists told us alopecia, I remember sitting there and just crying in the doctors office and taking my wig off as he looked at my head and began to tell me and my mum that the follicle off the hair was still there but the chances of it growing back were slim but determined to get my hair back we started treatments (which were not cheap, and involved very strong steroids going onto my head) eventually after trying and trying I gave up and had to accept that nothing was working so for the mean time stick to wigs And I can tell you now wigs 6-7 years ago were not what they are today! And one day a gorgeous soul who I will forever be great full too for this told me about franchises this young lady that was making wigs/ weaves. So my mum and i went and visited franchises and my god my life changed instantly, Franchesca made long human hair wigs, which was so exciting for me, I could straighten my hair!! I could have a long pony tail! My "hair" looked more real. And from then on kept hush about my hair. Over the past years me and franchises have spoken about doing something like this video and a few months ago, I agreed! Because I have nothing to be ashamed off in my words "I'm bold (literally) and strong" and yes hair is a major physical aspect to my appearance but my friends and family love me for me, my personality the person and was raised to be, I shouldn't have anything to feel ashamed off!

The word "alopecia" is a catch-all term that means hair loss, Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF. Alopecia areata, which the National Alopecia Areata Foundation calls "highly unpredictable," is classified as "the loss of hair on the scalp and elsewhere on the body," and it happens when the autoimmune system accidentally attacks hair follicles. More than 6.8 million people in the U.S. have or will develop the condition, which usually leads to

round, smooth spots on the scalp, at some point in their lives. But it can also cause total scalp hair loss (alopecia totalis) or total body hair loss (alopecia universalis), says the NAAF.

Even though all alopecia involves hair loss, not all hair loss involves alopecia—so if you notice an uptick in strands on your brush or the shower floor, how do you know if it's normal or an autoimmune issue?

Regular hair loss can be caused by things like intense stress, New York City dermatologist Doris Day, M.D., tells SELF. And according to Goldenberg, it's considered normal to lose about 100 hairs a day. "But this isn't real hair loss," he says. "It's a normal cycle of hair shedding and new healthy hair growing in its place."

Losing more than that can be a sign you may have some sort of health issue, Goldenberg says. More specifically, Ted Lain, M.D., a dermatologist practicing in the Austin, Texas, area, tells SELF that alopecia areata often starts as round patches of hair loss on any area of your body that contains hair. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, "You may first notice the problem when you see clumps of hair on your pillow or in the shower." In addition, you might see so-called "exclamation mark" hairs, or short hairs on the edges of bald spots that get slimmer at the bottom.

Nail issues also often accompany alopecia. If you've noticed unexplained problems like small dents, white spots or lines, dullness, or splitting, it can be another sign of the condition—whether you're losing hair or not, since "sometimes nail changes are the first sign of alopecia areata," according to the AAD.

Luckily, there is often something doctors can do about it. Nutrition can be a big factor—many female patients who experience hair loss have an iron deficiency and need to increase their iron intake, Goldenberg says. A category of medications called JAK2 inhibitors, which affect enzymes that influence the immune system, may also be effective, Day says, noting that she had one patient with alopecia areata whose hair grew back after taking them.

But there can be any number of reasons why you experience hair loss, which is why Goldenberg says it's so crucial to see a dermatologist if it happens to you. "Many types of hair loss are reversible or can be treated," he says.