

# What is traction alopecia?

There are many types of alopecia. Alopecia means hair loss. People with traction alopecia lose hair in areas of the scalp where their hair is pulled tight or strained a lot.

Certain hair styles can cause or worsen traction alopecia. This includes tight buns, ponytails, braids, locs, extensions, weaves, and cornrows. Traction alopecia can happen to anyone at any age and any gender or ethnic group.

If your hair is very dry or if it has been treated with chemicals (like a perm, relaxer, or texturizers) it may break more easily with tight hairstyles.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF TRACTION ALOPECIA?

At first, a person may feel itching or pain where the hair is pulled, like at the hairline. Sometimes, the scalp does not itch or hurt. You may also see redness, darker skin, or small bumps.

In time, the hair becomes thinner and wispy. Eventually, the hair may not grow back. It can also break more easily.

If someone has traction alopecia for a long time, the hair may not grow back like they had before.

## HOW IS TRACTION ALOPECIA DIAGNOSED?

The different types of alopecia on the scalp have different signs and symptoms. Your child's doctor will diagnose this type of hair loss by looking at your child's scalp and hair. The doctor may also ask about the hair care routine and styling. Testing is not usually needed to make a diagnosis of traction alopecia.

## HOW IS TRACTION ALOPECIA TREATED?

**If caught early, traction alopecia is treatable.**

It is important to use a gentle hair care routine to keep hair from breaking easily. When you need to comb the hair, use a wide toothed comb and start at the ends, working your way up toward the scalp as the hair detangles. This helps avoid more breakage of the hair. Avoid chemicals or heat treatments that feel like they dry out your child's hair. If you have curly or coiled hair, using hair products made for your hair texture can be helpful. If you have itching, pain, or bumps in your scalp, your doctor may give you medications to apply. Download the SPD's Curly and Coily Hair handout here: <https://pedsderm.net/for-patients-families/patient-handouts/#CurlyandCoilyHairCare>

The best treatment for traction alopecia is to avoid hair styles that pull the hair tight. Looser hair styles can help the hair grow back. Alternating different hair styles can also help.

## HAIR STYLES AND TRACTION ALOPECIA

### HIGHEST RISK

- » Frequent use of tight buns or ponytails
- » Application of weaves and/or braids to relaxed hair
- » Hair extensions applied to relaxed hair
- » Tight braids/cornrows/locs
- » Any hairstyle causing symptoms such as pain, stinging, crusting, tenting, or pimples

### MEDIUM RISK

- » Loose braids/cornrows/locs
- » Weaves and braids applied to natural hair
- » Hair extensions applied to natural hair (without glue)
- » Wigs worn with cotton or nylon wig caps
- » Head scarves, if tight at frontal hairline
- » Permanent waving
- » Heavy hair ornamentation (beads, barrettes)

### LOWEST RISK

- » Loose, low-hanging ponytails and buns
- » Wigs worn with satin cap
- » Natural/unprocessed hair



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