

## HEALTH VIEWS

### EXCITING BIOLOGICALS

Q. I have alopecia areata totalis. I have lost all my hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. Is there any new therapy being used ?

A. Alopecia areata is a disorder in which the immune system, probably the T-cells, turn on the hair follicle and cause abnormal amounts of hair to fall out. Unfortunately, despite its devastating effects, there is no official treatment or “approved treatment” for alopecia areata. Dermatologists use “off label” therapies in attempts to alter the course of AA, and sometimes hair regrows.

There is a new therapy for psoriasis, another T-cell mediated skin disorder. It’s the “Biologicals.” These are subcutaneous injections. Patients must continue to take good care of their skin with emollient creams, and perhaps some prescription creams. However, the weekly injections with one of the exciting new Biologicals provide clearing and control of psoriasis for many, by working on those T-cells. It is obtained from specialized pharmacies, and costs about \$900 to \$1000 a month. The patient generally has to pay for the first month out of pocket, even when their insurance covers the Biological.

A few trials are beginning for severe alopecia areata with biologicals, and all there is at this time is hope. Because it is not proven for AA, Biologicals will initially only be used for patients who can afford self-payment. It would likely require three to six months of therapy to know if it is going to work in a particular case.

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