

## The Bare Facts

1. Discoid lupus erythematosus is an inflammation of the skin that can also affect the hair.
2. Discoid lupus is different to systemic lupus.
3. Discoid lupus causes scarring hair loss, where follicles are destroyed.
4. Steroids applied to or injected into the skin and anti-malarial tablets taken orally aim to stop new patches from forming and existing patches from enlarging.
5. Sunlight is a trigger, and should be avoided. Sunscreens are important when spending time outdoors.

## Where to look for help

1. Your local doctor should be your first point of call, he or she will be able to refer you to a dermatologist for an opinion.
2. Be careful of bogus hair treatments; most are harmless, but many are expensive.
3. More information can be found on our website:

[www. alopecia.com.au](http://www alopecia.com.au)

Understanding

Discoid Lupus  
Erythematosus

The Australasian Hair and Wool Research Society  
Department of Dermatology  
St. Vincent's Hospital  
41 Victoria Parade  
Fitzroy VIC 3065

The Skin and Cancer Foundation (VIC)  
95 Rathdowne Street  
Carlton VIC 3053



**Discoid lupus erythematosus** is an inflammation of the skin that can also affect the hair. Discoid lupus erythematosus (DLE) is different to systemic lupus erythematosus. Whilst, occasionally the two conditions can occur together, this is uncommon and most people with DLE do not have systemic lupus erythematosus, which is a more serious condition.

DLE may occur on the scalp without involving the skin elsewhere. When DLE occurs on the scalp it produces a scarring alopecia.

this means that the hair bulbs are destroyed and once they have been destroyed, there is no potential for regrowth. This is analogous to a daffodil. If there is a bulb present in the ground a new daffodil will appear each spring, whereas, if the bulb is destroyed the daffodils stop coming. Similarly, if



the hair bulbs are destroyed, the hairs stop coming.

The aim of treating DLE is to stop new patches developing and to stop the existing patches from enlarging. By doing this, the hairs on the scalp will be protected from further destruction. Even with successful treatment, regrowth does not occur from where the hairs have been lost.

Discoid lupus of the scalp can usually be treated with topical or injected corticosteroids. Some patients will also require anti-malarial tablets. A very small percentage of patients will not respond to any of these measures and alternative treatment will need to be tried.

Eventually, discoid lupus of the scalp burns itself out and the inflammation

stops. Once this has happened it may be possible to repair some of the areas of scarring by hair transplantation to make them less noticeable.

How long it takes for the discoid lupus to burn itself out is unpredictable.

Sunlight has been shown to be the key trigger for DLE and regardless of the treatment used, you must protect your scalp from the sun. It is important to wear a hat at all times when outdoors and sunscreen on all the exposed areas of the scalp and body.

While anti-malarial tablets will usually be required in the summer months, many patients are able to stop them during the winter months, provided they protect their scalp from the sun.