

Table 1**Differential diagnoses**

Trichotillomania	This is compulsive hair plucking, and is easily distinguished from alopecia areata by a very characteristic prickly feel to affected areas, caused by broken hairs. Alopecia areata and trichotillomania occasionally coexist
Tinea capitis	Fungal scalp infection results in patches of hair loss, often with broken hairs, scaling and itch
Scarring alopecia	In the early stages, scarring alopecia of various aetiologies can resemble alopecia areata
Telogen effluvium	This is a physiological condition caused by synchronisation of the hair cycles that results in diffuse hair loss in the telogen phase. It may be difficult to differentiate from the diffuse type of alopecia areata
Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and secondary syphilis	SLE and secondary syphilis may result in patchy hair loss