Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley Boldly Discloses Her Alopecia

In a video message, she bared her bald head and explained to little Black girls why she can't wear braids anymore.

January 21, 2020 By Alicia Green

Representative Ayanna Pressley is known for rocking her hair in Senegalese and bomb twists, which some detractors have called militant. But lately, she has switched from these styles to exclusively wearing lace-front wigs. The reason? Pressley has alopecia areata, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss on the scalp and other parts of the body, she reveals in an exclusive interview with The Root.

"My twists have become such a synonymous and conflated part of not only my personal identity and how I show up in the world but my political brand," Pressley said. "That's why I think it's important that I'm transparent about this new normal and living with alopecia."

Last fall, Pressley detected signs of the condition. She noticed bald patches while getting her hair retwisted. From there, things "accelerated very quickly." She'd wake up every morning to see the sink filled with shed hair.

There are three common forms of alopecia: alopecia areata (patches of baldness), alopecia areata totalis (no hair on the head) and alopecia areata universalis (complete hair loss on a person's body). According to experts, no studies have determined whether the prevalence of alopecia areata differs between ethnic groups. (But a form of alopecia called traction alopecia affects one third of women of African descent who wear hairstyles that stress their tresses, such as too-tight buns, ponytails and weaves, among other styles.)

"Every night, I was employing all the tools that I had been schooled and trained in throughout my life as a Black woman because I thought that I could stop this," Pressley explained. She wrapped her hair, wore a bonnet and even slept on a silk pillowcase. These tactics resolved nothing. The hair continued to pile up in her sink each morning.

The last of Pressley's hair fell out the night before the House of Representatives was to vote on whether to impeach President Donald Trump, forcing her to quickly devise a plan. She met with Jamal Edmonds, dubbed "the hair caregiver," and he created a custom wig for her just hours before she delivered her vote.

“I didn’t have the luxury of mourning what felt like the loss of a limb,” Pressley said. “It was a moment of transformation not of my choosing. But I knew that the moment demanded that I stand in it. That I lean in.”

As soon as she was able to, Pressley exited the House chamber and hid in a bathroom stall. “I felt naked, exposed, vulnerable,” she said. “I felt embarrassed…ashamed…betrayed. I also felt that I was participating in a cultural betrayal because of all the little girls who write me letters, come up to me and take selfies with me.”

Pressley said she knew she would go public when she was ready. She felt she owed those little girls an explanation. Although she didn’t disclose the cause of her alopecia, the congresswoman bravely unveiled her bald head for the first time.

Pressley shared that she’s ready to be free of the secret and the shame. “I am making peace with having alopecia,” she said. “I have not arrived there. I am very early in my alopecia journey, but I’m making progress every day.”

For more on Black hair health, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/congresswoman-ayanna-pressley-boldly-discloses-alopecia