

Premature Graying of Hair: An Ayurvedic Perspective

Reena Rawat

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About Our Guest Editor



Dr Reena Rawat, a world-renowned Healer and Nutrition Expert is currently serving as Deputy Manager (Service and Research) at Dr. Shikha's **Dr Shikha's Nutri Health**, a platform offering comprehensive health and diet management programs to thousands of patients across India. Dr Rawat completed her B.A.M.S. from the coveted A & U Tibbia College-cum-Hospital, University of Delhi and tuned her healing and advanced nutritive skills during her double post-doctoral diplomas in Yoga and Naturopathy obtained from the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, and the International Foundation of Natural Health & Yoga. Following her Internship as Ayurvedic Physician undertaken at the coveted University College of Medical Sciences & GTB Hospital, New Delhi, she eventually joined **Dr Shikha's Nutri Health** in 2007, and continues to contribute to the betterment of people's health through this globally famous platform till date.

Dr. Reena is quoted frequently by many leading publications. A well-known face on television channels, she is also frequently invited to give talks at professional platforms and for patient awareness. Dr Reena practices a unique amalgamation of the ancient Ayurvedic knowledge and skills and contemporary evidence-based nutritional therapeutics.

Author Affiliation:

Dr Shikha's NutriHealth, Okhla
Industrial Area, New Delhi, Delhi
110020, India.

Corresponding Author:

Dr Reena Rawat,

Dr Shikha's NutriHealth, Okhla
Industrial Area, New Delhi, Delhi
110020, India..

E-mail: drreena@nutrihealthsystems.com

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Ayurveda, the ancient healing system of India and one of the oldest healing systems of the world defines the fundamental composition of the human body as a combination of three different *doshas* (types of bio-energies), which are named as -*VATA*, *PITTA* and *KAPHA*. Each individual is constituted by a varying combination of these three *doshas* - Vata, Pitta and Kapha, in which usually, two types tend to predominate. In non-vitiated form they nourish our system but an imbalance of these doshas whether aggravated or depleted, leads to disease. This concept is in sharp contrast to the conventional western system of medicine.

Another important term is '*prakriti*' referring to 'constitutional tendency'. In broad terms *Vata* is responsible for functions aligned to the movement in the body (such as food movement through the bowels, nerve communication, flow of nutrients, thinking, cognition etc), *Pitta* is responsible for digestion and metabolism (including digestion and assimilation of food) and *Kapha* is responsible for growth and development of the body (in vitiated form this growth can form tumours).

Pitta dosha has qualities like unctuousness, hot, swift, liquid, mobility, sour and pungent taste. It is responsible for regulation of functions like digestion, body temperature, hunger, thirst and vision. Graying of hair, hair fall and general skin disorders are more common in individuals with *Pitta prakriti*. In simple terms, aggravation of *Pitta dosha* leads to graying of hair and skin disorders.

Gray Hairs - Premature canities and Ayurveda

In Ayurveda graying of hair is called as *Palitya* [1]. Graying of hair according to age is a common phenomenon. Conventionally, graying of hair is a marker of progressive chronological age. But drastic changes in today's life style and environmental pollution have led to the increasing trend of premature graying of hair. In Ayurveda premature graying of hair is called "*Akalpalitya*". Premature or early graying of hair is frequently being observed these days due to erratic lifestyle including eating habits, and polluted environment. Melanocytes of the hair follicle are responsible for the color of hairs and depletion of melanocytes leads to graying of hair. In Ayurveda aggravation of *Pitta* and *Ushna Guna* (also referring to hot/heat quality) leads to premature graying of hair.

Causes of Palitya

Four main reasons have been cited: (1) Dietary (*Aharaja*); (2) Life-style(*Viharaja*); (3) Psychological (*mansik*); and (4) Unknown (*adibalapravritha*) [2].

- 1. Nutritional (Aharaja):** Excessive use of pungent, sour and salty foods aggravates *Pitta dosha*, e.g. excessive consumption of mustard and curd. Excessive use of salt in diet aggravates *Pitta* (as mentioned in *charaka sutrasthana atreyabhadrakapiyaadhyaya*) [2]. Excess use of other pungent/hot/sour foods such as amla phala (sour fruits), sesame oil (til ka tail), linseed (alasi), goat flesh, fish (*matsya*), sheep (*aavika*), in addition to mustard, curd and excess salt cause the vitiation of *pitta* leading to *palitya* [3]. In terms of conventional medical opinion, premature graying of hair has been associated with deficiency of

Iron, vitamin B12, Calcium & Vitamin D3 and other micronutrients [4-6]. However, correlative study such as the effect of mustard and linseed on the absorption of iron and vitamin B12 do not exist, although merit exploration.

- 2. Lifestyle (Viharaja):** Overindulgence in physical exercise (*ativyayama*), nighttime awakening (*raatrijagarana*), excessive sunlight exposure (*atiatapasevan*), intake of vitiated air (*dushitvayusevan*), smoking (*dhumasevan*), excess fasting (*upvasa*) may cause the *palitya* [7].
- 3. Psychological (Mansik):** Certain psychological morbidities like anger (*krodha*), fear (*bhaya*), grief (*shoka*), and mental stress (*maansikashrama*) vitiate the *pitta dosha* thereby contributing to *palitya* [7].
- 4. Unknown/Genetic (Adibalapravritha):** It is well-established that genetic inheritance contributes >90% of premature graying [4,5]. Ayurvedic principles also identify this aspect of this condition.

Summarizing Ayurvedic Pathogenesis of Graying of Hair (Fig. 1)

How to deal with Gray Hairs

1. Avoid *Pitta* aggravating food, lifestyle and psychological factors.
2. Madhura (Sweet), tikta (Bitter) & Kashaya (Astringent) rasa diminish the *pitta dosha*- like Moong daal (whole or split green gram, yellow moong dal), cow's *ghee*, milk, coconut and dates.
3. *Nasyam Therapy* - An Ayurvedic therapy in which medicated oils are administered in the nostrils.
4. Regular use of hair oil, especially Bhringraj oil.

This short Editorial just gave you a glimpse into the approach to pathogenesis of graying of hair as per Ayurvedic healing system. Trials with correlation/contrast with the conventional system would be fruitful in possibly deriving a

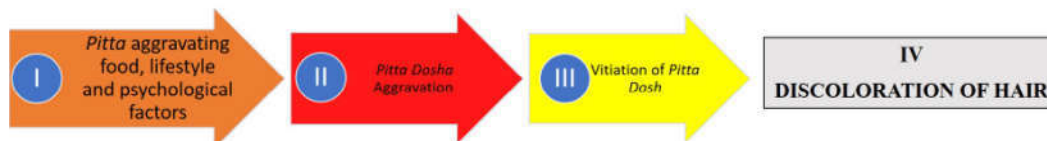


Fig. 1: Schematic diagram depicting the pathogenesis of premature graying of hair as per the Ayurvedic Principles

unified theory of pathogenesis and healing of this increasing menace.

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