

Premature greying is a growing cause of concern today

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Hair plays an important role in a person's physical appearance and self perception. Greying of hair is an eventual and irreversible process that occurs in varying degrees in all individuals regardless of gender or race mostly because of ageing. It is a growing cause of concern today as it can be seen in children and young adults. Greying is said to be premature if it occurs before the age of 20 years. It leads to low self-esteem and confidence often interfering with socio-cultural adjustments. It is often viewed as sign of old age and loss of health and vigour.

Hair follicles contain pigment producing cells which produces the pigment melanin that gives

colour to the hair. With aging the melanin production reduces leading to greying of hair. Premature greying reflects early exhaustion of these pigment cells.

Causes of premature greying

The cause of greying is not clear. It is a complex multifactorial process with genetic, nutritional and environmental factors playing a role. Here are likely factors:

■ Premature greying of hair is often seen in families suggesting a familial predisposition. It can occur alone as an autosomal dominant condition or as a part of various autoimmune or premature ageing syndromes.

■ Nutritional deficiencies like iron deficiency, zinc deficiency, copper deficiency, vitamin B12



and vitamin D deficiency are often found associated with premature greying.

■ Environmental factors such as prolonged exposure to ultraviolet rays and pollution can

also lead to greying as it leads to build up of oxidative stress causing damage to melanin producing cells.

■ Medical condition like thyroid disease, vitiligo, hormonal imbalance, anaemia can also affect melanin production causing premature greying.

■ Smoking, stress, use of chemicals and dyes are other factors that is considered to be related to premature greying of hair.

Treatment options

■ Greying of hair is considered progressive and permanent. Despite the extensive molecular research being carried out to understand the causes of greying, there are no adequate evidence-based treatment options.

■ Topical melatonin gel can be applied to prevent greying

■ Topical photoprotectors and UV blockers are under trial

■ Oral nutritional supplementation with zinc, biotin, copper, selenium, methionine, l-cyitene can be taken. Correction of any underlying nutritional deficiency can be helpful. Make sure your diet contains sufficient amount of green vegetables and fruits

■ Use of mild shampoos, ammonia free hair colorants or natural hair colourants like henna may help slow down the process.

Since the reasons for premature greying is varied it is advisable to consult your dermatologist/ trichologist for treatment before trying anything yourself.

The author is a celebrity cosmetic dermatologist and founder of Kosmoderma Skin & Hair Clinic