

Can nutrition help reverse white hair?

What you need to know about premature graying of hair

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The hair is not referred to as our crowning glory for nothing. Indeed it is one of, if not the first, things to be noticed in a person's appearance. It exudes style and personality, is used to make a bold statement, reflects our mental and emotional state, and gives us an idea about a person's health. It also makes us look wiser and more seasoned as we age.



Premature graying of hair (PGH), however, isn't likely to be willingly embraced by anyone. How would you feel if you see gray or white hair in your thirties or worse, in your twenties? It may mess with your self-esteem! There are several causes of PGH. But first, it is important to understand what happens when your jet-black hair turns a lighter shade. The hair has a follicle that attaches it to the skin layer. The hair follicles contain pigments called melanin, which is responsible for the natural hair color. As we age, melanin production decreases thus hair turns grey and eventually white when pigment production ceases.

Age-related change in hair pigmentation or color is unfortunately irreversible. Genetics also play a role as some people tend to have pearly white hair in their golden years and some would have that tinge of salt and pepper look.

Let us now look at some of the reasons why your hair turns grey even before its time. According to Alshimaa M El-Sheikh et al's study on the Relationship between Trace Elements and Premature Hair Graying published in the International Journal of Trichology in 2018, "Premature hair graying is associated with various autoimmune disorders such as vitiligo, pernicious anemia, thyroid diseases, and premature aging syndromes such as Werner's syndrome. Furthermore, studies have shown a role for environmental factors such as ultraviolet light, climate, smoking, drugs, trace elements, and nutritional deficiencies in the pathogenesis of premature graying."

The abovementioned conditions are associated with an unhealthy immune system, inflammation, and nutrient deficiencies, as well as unhealthy lifestyle habits. If you are experiencing PGH, there is hope for the reversal of your condition. Get down to the root cause of your gray hairs.

Deficiencies in vitamin B6, vitamin B12, vitamin B3, vitamin B5, and Biotin, as well as low levels of the minerals iron, copper, and calcium, are associated with PGH. But before you pop those pills for supplementation, it is recommended that you consult a registered nutritionist or dietitian for proper assessment. It is also important to primarily get the nutrients that you need from whole foods and most if not all, plant-based sources.

Vitamin B12 may be a challenge for vegetarians and vegans as it is abundant in animal food sources. Mushrooms and some seaweed contain cobalamin or vitamin B12. The B vitamins are abundant in plant

foods like beans and other legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits, and vegetables. Leafy vegetables are high in calcium and iron. The Filipinos are very fortunate to have an abundant supply of nutrient-rich malunggay and kangkong.

Consuming plant foods isn't limited to correcting nutrient imbalances. After all, only plant foods contain phytochemicals or phytonutrients. They help balance the immune system by reducing inflammatory reactions in the body, which could damage hair follicles. These phytochemicals promote a healthy gut and immune system which

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are both vital in managing thyroid autoimmune diseases that can cause hair to turn gray prematurely. Calcium deficiency is often caused by a lack of vitamin D which aids in its optimal absorption. Make sure that you get about 10 to 15 minutes of sun exposure daily for your daily dose of that sunshine vitamin. Otherwise, consult your dietitian or physician for proper supplementation.

Don't lose hope when you see budding gray or white hairs on your head. Take charge of what and how you eat, let go of unhealthy lifestyle habits like smoking and taking recreational drugs, and consult a health professional for proper diagnosis and management of your health status, medical condition, and nutritional requirements.