Y.R. Agrawal
Diseases of Hair & Nails

Reading excerpt
Diseases of Hair & Nails
of Y.R. Agrawal
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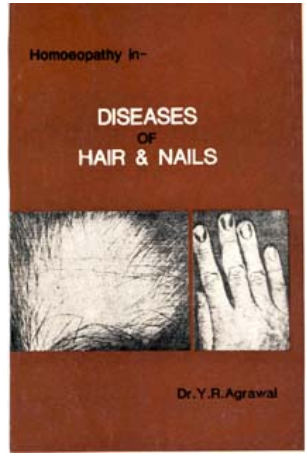

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ANATOMY OF HAIR

A hair is a development, in the form of a cylinder, of a cap of corneous epidermis surmounting a papilla of the dermis sunk to the bottom of a tabular pit, or involution of the skin, called a hair follicle. It can also be called as the hirsute appendage of the skin.

The hair covers a considerable part of the skin. It is absent on the palms of the hands, soles of feet and certain other part of the body. The trunk and extremities are covered with thin hair (fluff). The hair of the eyebrows and eye lashes is short and bristly. Long hair grows on the head, in the axillae, on the symphisis pubis and, in males, also on the skin of the face (moustache and beard).

A hair consists of shaft and a root. The shaft is above the skin and the root is in the skin. The thickened part of the hair root is called the hair bulb. It has a recess which contains the hair papilla. Hair is composed of altered keratinized cells of cutaneous epithelium. Only the cells of the hair bulb contain no kertian ; these cells continuously multiply. The hair grows from the hair bulb. The hair papilla is composed of connective tissue and contains blood capillaries which nourish the hair bulb. The hair root is surrounded by a hair sac which consists of cutaneous epithelium and connective tissue. The ducts of sebaceous gland open into hair sacs.

The hair is not hollow, but is harder on the outside than in, the centre of the hair shaft. Hairs differ in shape, straight hair is round in cross-section | curly hair oval shaped, elliptical. The shape and colour of individual hairs as well as the general pattern of hair distribution is determined chiefly by heredity. The hair that appears above the surface of the skin can be treated and manipulated in a variety of ways but this does not change the colour and shape of the new hairs that keep growing. They, too, have to be treated

Human hair normally grows about an inch in six weeks. A woman's hair if uncut, may reach a length of about 2 feet in 3 to 4 years. Cutting the hair has no effect on the rate at which it grows.

Babies are born with a fine, downy hair, called lanugo, which disappears shortly after birth. Normal hair on the scalp and other parts of the body (for example, the beard) becomes thicker and coarser (increases in diameter) with increasing age. In middle age men often discover hairs growing in their ears, and women especially about the time of the menopause, may find excess hair on their faces. This is the result of the normal change in the endocrine pattern.

Density, texture, movement, colour and condition are five characteristics which determine the look of hair, The first four are a result of heredity. The fifth is a result of how one cares for or abuse natural material.

Density. Whether hair is thick or thin depends on the number of hair follicles with which one is born with. Light hair have the most, than browns.

Texture. Coarse or fine refers to the dimension of each hair shaft.

Fine hair is silky, usually shiny, soft and slippery, springs out of rollers, dries slowly if thick and abundant, drops quickly out of set.

Coarse hair is springy, usually thick, strong, sometimes glossy but often wiry and lacking sheen, usually sets well, but wants it own way and dries quickly.

Some hairs may be a mixture of fine and coarse hairs, but usually one or other dominates.

Movement. This is determined by the growth pattern in the papilla, which defines the shape of the hair shaft.

Straight hair is smooth and strong, can be fine or coarse, ties flat when wet; hates to curl, resists setting, falls quickly into par. tings. *Wavy* hair has lots of movement, more when short than long, can be fine or coarse, waves more when wet ; holds set well. *Curly* hair is springy, usually coarse and strong ; difficult to set ; tendency to frizz.

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, Colour. The natural colouring of hair is due to a pigment called melanin which is present in the cortex. The difference in hair colour is determined by the percentage of the four natural pigments—black, brown, red and yellow and the number of air-spaces in the cortex of the hair.

The colour of the hair is generally black or blackish brownish and when one attains the old age it becomes white. In youth also some people have premature grey hair which may need medical care.

Hair condition. The general health and state of the scalp usually dictate strength and health of hair. Below are descriptions of different hair conditions.

Healthy hair is pliant and smooth surfaced ; has a faint coating of sebum ; remains smooth when wet ; tangles little ; scalp free of flakes ; slightly oily. *Dry and strawlike hair* is poor, brittle hair, split at ends and sometimes throughout its length. Hair lacks elasticity, breaking off when stretched. Scalp could have dry powdery flakes. The main causes are natural, wear and tear mechanical damage, and chemical damage.

(a) Natural. It means insufficient moisture level in the cortex. Another factor can be a lack of sebum flow along the hair shaft. Since each hair naturally contains water, if there is a lack of sebum to prevent evaporation much of this moisture is lost, causing the hair to dry out. This can be a hereditary tendency, or part of the ageing process. As a symptom of poor health, dry hair and perhaps dry scalp could result from hormonal imbalance, for example after pregnancy, or from emotional problems or poor diet. Some dry hair problems are really scalp disorders and be accompained by dandruff.

(b) *Wear and tear and mechanical damage.* Many of us injure our hair simply by washing it wrongly. The correct shampoo to prevent damage should be a mild one if you like to wash your hair frequently. Harsh objects such as spiky, heated or brush rollers, metal combs and plastic brushes will cause further damage to hair. Never use elastic bands as they tear the hair ; a length of string is preferable. Limit the damage done by heated rollers by wrapping thin foam rubber around them. Electric tongs are drying and can

burn ends badly. Never iron or tong your hair to strengthen it. Central heating and chlorinated water are also drying.

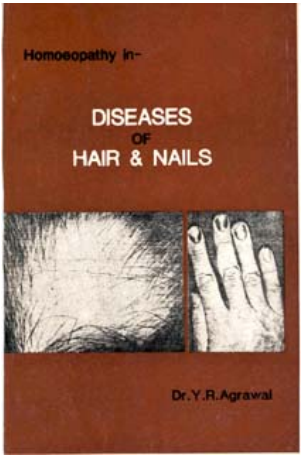
(c) *Chemical damage.* This causes the protective cuticle to rupture, and sometimes to disappear altogether. It comes about when hair is carelessly or too frequently bleached, tinted, permed or straightened. It produces a symptom known as over porosity, in which the cells of the hair shaft break down and become very soft and stretchy.

Dry and damaged hair should be conditioned regularly, but if used excessively, conditioner can make hair greasy and lank. Rough, tangled hair needs a conditioner straight after washing. This is usually rinsed through to ensure an even spread ; it makes combing much easier and adds body and shine.

Greasy hair becomes oily a day or two after washing. Often accompained by spots on forehead and nose. Hair needs natural oils for health and gloss, but if sebaceous glands are over active hair becomes lank after a day or two. The cause is often glandular, and the condition is prevalent in adolescene when excess oil may well be seen round the nose and on the forehead and could partner a spotty skin. Other causes are pregnacy, climatic change, too rich a diet and nervous upsets. Baby-fine hair tends to look greasy quickly, but it should not be treated as such, just wash fairly often.

Diet plays an important part in caring for greasy hair. Fatty food, spicy dishes and hot, strong tea and coffee, which are stimulants, all increase the activity of the sebaceous glands. Choose protein foods such as meat, eggs and fish, with plenty of fresh foods and vegetables, and you will probably end up in much better shape altogether.

Oily hair. Hair grows out from hair follicles, also called hair roots, located at the bottom of the layer of true skin. Along the tubes from which the growing hair shaft emerges are situated one or more tiny oil glands (sebaceous glands), which excrete an oily substance (sebum). These excretions give the hair its lustre and sheen. When mild or severe disorders in the body affect these glands and dry them up, the hair becomes dry and brittle. When these glands are over stimulated the hair and skin, may be too oily. Oily hair could mean that the diet that one takes is overloaded with butter,



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