

# An Ayurvedic Guide to Healthy Hair

A Natural and Holistic Approach

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There are many different types of hair out there, and we all want what's best for ours. After all, the hair is often one of the most prominent aspects of a person's physical appearance, likely second only to one's face. And given the choice, who among us wouldn't want healthy, lustrous hair to style as we see fit? If our hair didn't matter to us in a collective sense, there wouldn't be a multi-billion dollar hair care industry peddling their products on the market. The problem is that many of these products contain harmful chemicals that can have an extremely detrimental impact on both the hair and critical internal systems like the endocrine and nervous systems. Unfortunately, most hair products only manage to treat the hair superficially—and sometimes only temporarily—often damaging the hair in the process.

The Ayurvedic approach is different. Ayurvedic hair care employs both products and treatment strategies that are 100% natural. Furthermore, the Ayurvedic tradition is intrinsically holistic. So whether you choose a topical treatment for the hair itself, a more systemic approach, or a combination of the two, Ayurveda aims to address the root cause of the problem—which often originates well beneath the surface.



In fact, one of the foundational principles of Ayurveda is that the strength of *agni* (the digestive fire) determines the quality of nourishment received by organs and tissues throughout the body, including the hair. So according to Ayurveda, the health of the hair begins with the food we eat, and depends deeply on our digestive strength—as does the health of every other tissue and system. That said, our bodies are vastly intelligent and its systems exquisitely interdependent, so our hair can also be affected by imbalances outside of the digestive tract, unique personal and hereditary vulnerabilities, as well as our stress levels and the overall quality of our lives.

Despite being over 5,000 years old, Ayurveda offers quite an impressive number of treatment strategies for optimizing hair health, all of which remain relevant today. What follows is an introduction to Ayurvedic hair care—from theory to practice. Our intention is to support you in expanding your understanding of the Ayurvedic approach, and to give you the practical tools to optimize your hair’s strength, abundance, luster, and shine.

### Common Terms Used to Describe Different Hair Types

**Thin:** fewer individual hairs on the head.

**Thick:** an abundance of individual hairs on the head.

**Fine:** each strand of hair is narrow.

**Coarse:** each strand of hair is broad.

## Ayurveda’s View of the Hair

Your hair, when it is healthy, reflects your constitution—your unique ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha. And because we each have all three *doshas* in our constitutions, it is entirely possible (common, even) for our hair to express a combination of different doshic characteristics. In other words, it is rare to find someone with exclusively vata-type hair, pitta-type hair, or kapha-type hair. You will likely recognize traits from at least two doshas in your hair, and possibly all three.

### Ayurvedic Hair Types

**Healthy Vata-Type Hair** is relatively thin, but often a bit coarse, may be straight, curly, or a combination of the two, grows quickly, and can be a bit unruly—potentially making it more challenging to style.

**Healthy Pitta-Type Hair** is straight, soft, predictable, and of moderate thickness, but very fine.

**Healthy Kapha-Type Hair** is typically wavy, lustrous, full, strong, coarse, and thick.



If your hair health is currently compromised, it is important to assess your natural hair type based on life-long patterns, before you noticed your hair beginning to change. And remember, the Ayurvedic approach is not about trying to alter the fundamentals of your hair, but rather about inviting it to be its absolute best. This is an important distinction because our culture tends to regard healthy kapha-type hair as especially desirable, and many of us develop the idea that our natural hair type is somehow inadequate. While most of us stand to benefit from Ayurveda's rich hair care traditions, we must also learn to celebrate our unique natural beauty along the way.



## Common Imbalances

On the other hand, imbalances can and quite often do impact both the strength and appearance of our hair. And this can absolutely be remedied. The following symptoms may help to give you an idea of which dosha(s) may be compromising your hair:

**Excess Vata** causes the hair to be dry, frizzy, brittle, and lusterless. It also causes the hair to thin, fall out in clumps, become shorter and more difficult to grow out, and present with split ends.

**Excess Pitta** causes excess heat in the hair follicles, which can damage the hair and lead to premature thinning, early greying, and baldness. Heat in the hair follicles is often accompanied by a tendency to be hot-headed, short-tempered, or excessively ambitious.

**Excess Kapha** causes excessive oiliness, heaviness, and thickness in the hair.

## Making Deeper Connections

According to Ayurveda, the hair is a byproduct of the bone tissue, as are the nails and teeth, making all of these tissues intimately connected. The hair is also linked to the nervous system and the gut, so if the health of any of these tissues deteriorates, the hair is likely to be affected. Similarly, if the quality of nutrition available to the deep tissues of the body is compromised, the hair will undoubtedly be impacted. This is where Ayurveda's whole-body approach can be infinitely more effective than superficial hair treatments alone.



## The Role of Stress

Chronic or excessive stress can be a remarkably important consideration as well, particularly with vata- or pitta-type hair imbalances—which are the most common. This is because, from the body’s perspective, the human stress response is geared toward increasing our chances of survival, and it only occurs when the body *perceives* that our survival may be threatened. These days, few sources of stress are truly life-threatening, but the nervous system doesn’t know this, and the cascade of hormones released when we are under stress is exactly the same, whether we are cramming to meet a deadline at work, or being chased by a hungry lion.

As it is designed to do, the stress response re-allocates bodily resources to help us survive the danger. Our heart rate increases, more energy is made available to the brain and large muscle groups, and our digestive and immune functions are sidelined. This is an exquisitely intelligent adaptation, and is not at all problematic, provided we encounter stress relatively infrequently (so that the body has ample opportunity to return to its natural state of equilibrium). Unfortunately, when stress becomes chronic, it begins to rob many of our tissues of the nutrition they need in order to maintain optimal health, and it can send the body into a self-perpetuating cycle of depletion. In this scenario, the bone tissue is vulnerable because the stress response increases the activity of cells that disassemble and break-down bone tissue (osteoclasts), thereby hindering the body’s capacity to maintain bone health. And if the bones are struggling to meet their own nutritional needs, the hair is invariably going to suffer as well.

All of this is to say that if stress is a familiar player in your day-to-day experience, stress-management may actually be an important element of your hair care regimen. If you are interested in a more in-depth exploration of stress and its role in our overall health, please see our [Guide to Stress Management](#).





# A Long Legacy of Holistic Hair Care

At its root, Ayurvedic hair care is largely about rejuvenation—for the hair, for specific tissues that may be affecting hair health, and for the body as a whole. Ayurveda has an entire limb devoted to rejuvenation (*rasayana*, in Sanskrit), which is the practice of offering deep nourishment (at a cellular level) to encourage the healing and regeneration of bodily tissues and systems. The following herbs are exceptionally revered for their capacity to promote the strength, luster, thickness, and overall health of the hair—largely due to their nourishing and rejuvenative properties. You will notice that these herbs make recurring appearances in the formulas and recommendations that follow.

## **Bhringaraj.**

Otherwise known as the “ruler of the hair,” **bhringaraj** is a cooling herb that has a strong affinity for the roots of the hair. It has long been appreciated for its ability to encourage abundant hair growth, protect the hair’s natural color and luster, while cooling the head and calming the mind. Though balancing for all three doshas, its cooling nature gives bhringaraj a particular capacity to pacify excess pitta, which can burn the hair follicles, damage the hair, and cause early greying or hair loss.

## **Amalaki.**

**Amalaki** is one of the three ingredients in **triphala**. It is a potent rejuvenative, a highly concentrated source of natural antioxidants, and it has a strong affinity for the hair and the bones—making it an effective addition to any hair care routine. Also powerfully cooling, amalaki is particularly pitta-pacifying, helping to remove excess heat from the digestive tract and elsewhere in the body, while gently encouraging the removal of toxins.

## **Triphala.**

This formula (which includes amalaki) offers a powerful source of both rejuvenation and detoxification that is naturally pacifying to all three doshas. In particular, triphala offers profound support for the digestive system and can therefore help to improve tissue nutrition throughout the body, which inevitably supports the hair.

## **Brahmi.**

**Brahmi** is highly revered for its capacity to cool, soothe, and quiet the mind, encouraging calm tranquility. Interestingly, it also acts as a nourishing rejuvenative for the digestive tract, scalp, and hair, making it a welcome systemic source of support for any hair care routine.

# The Outside-In Approach

Treating the hair directly is often the most intuitive means of delivering a little extra support to the hair and scalp. When it comes to Ayurveda, this approach can also be a potent tool for improving hair health at a deeper level. And interestingly, topical applications can be hugely beneficial for the hair, whether or not you are currently experiencing any imbalances.



## Benefits of Topical Hair Treatments

- **Superficial Tissues Are Receptive.** Much like the skin, the hair and scalp are quite capable of absorbing moisture and nutrients that are applied topically.
- **Access to Subtle Channels of the Mind.** Topical treatments are anything but superficial because the head is covered with potent energy points (*marmas*, in Sanskrit) that are connected to deeper, subtler channels throughout the mind and body.
- **Nourishment Goes Deep.** Nutritive treatments applied to the hair and scalp are carried through both physical and energetic channels to penetrate well beyond the surface. In fact, the oils so commonly used in Ayurvedic hair care, act as a potent vehicle for carrying herbal influences deep into the body and the mind.



## External Treatment Strategies to Consider

Here are a few suggestions as to how to nourish and strengthen your hair from the surface inward.

### Apply Oil to the Scalp and Hair

Once a week, apply [Healthy Hair Oil](#) to the hair and scalp. Massaging the scalp and hair with oil nourishes the cells, rejuvenates dry hair, stimulates circulation in the scalp, and promotes hair growth. The oil also helps to naturally cleanse and detoxify the scalp and the roots of the hair.

Simply place the oil in a small bowl, dip the fingertips of one hand in the oil, while parting the hair at the top of the head with the other hand, and apply the oil to the scalp. Then part the hair in an adjacent location and apply again, moving around the scalp until you have oiled the entire head. Next, massage a bit of oil into the length of the hair. Finally, spend a few minutes massaging the scalp with small, circular motions to stimulate circulation and to encourage the oil to absorb. After you have done this, let the oil sit for thirty minutes or longer. Some like to leave the oil in overnight, but if you do this, be sure to protect your bedding in some way. When you are ready to remove the oil, apply a gentle shampoo before wetting the hair and rinse with lukewarm water in the shower. If necessary, follow with a second shampoo.

If oiling the hair is a new practice for you, here is a helpful [instructional video](#).



## Apply Amalaki Paste to the Hair

As we have seen, amalaki pacifies pitta, helps to remove excess heat from the head, protects the color and luster of the hair, and serves to prevent excess hair loss.

### Recipe: Amalaki Paste

- ½ cup [amalaki powder](#)
- 3 ounces water or yogurt (for a more conditioning effect)

In a small bowl, whisk these ingredients together until smooth and apply to the scalp and hair either by hand or with a small brush.

Apply the amalaki paste with the same technique that was used to apply the oil above, beginning at the top of the head and parting the hair bit by bit to apply the paste as close to the scalp as possible. Then apply a bit of paste to the length of the hair, cover with a shower cap to keep the paste from drying out, and let sit for at least 30 minutes before rinsing with lukewarm water in the shower.

## Protect Your Hair from Harm

It is also important to be mindful of what other influences may be impacting your hair. Heat from repeated ironing, blow drying, or even excessively hot shower water can strip the hair of natural oils, dry it out, damage the hair, and overheat the scalp and the hair follicles. Of course, it is also best to use natural shampoos, conditioners, coloring agents, and styling products so as not to introduce harmful chemicals to the hair or the deeper tissues. Over-washing can also damage and dry out the hair, so pay careful attention to how often you wash your hair. If you are accustomed to washing your hair daily, gradually reduce your frequency until you find the rhythm that is right for your hair type. If you are accustomed to styling your hair while it's wet, rinsing the hair daily with lukewarm water (and without shampoo) will not have the same tendency to strip the hair of its natural oils. And Ayurveda does recommend brushing the hair daily to stimulate circulation at the roots and to encourage robust health throughout. It is best to brush the hair when it is dry to prevent breakage. Consider brushing the hair in different directions for added benefit.

## The Inside-Out Approach

Treating the hair directly certainly makes a ton of sense if you're eager to improve the health and appearance of your hair. But, as we hope is clear by now, offering systemic support is an equally effective means of improving the overall health of your hair and the nourishment it is receiving. This approach also serves to address system-wide imbalances, and begins to correct your symptoms at their root, which has far-reaching health benefits that stretch well beyond the appearance of your hair.





## Benefits of Systemic Treatments for the Hair

- **Improved Overall Health.** When we treat the hair internally and holistically, we can't help but treat the entire system, which helps to improve the overall experience of wellness and vitality.
- **Address Imbalances at Their Root.** This systemic approach looks beyond the hair to the root cause of the problem and delivers balancing influences where they will best be received and integrated for improved health and well-being.
- **Bolstered Digestive Strength.** When we begin to heal the digestive tract, the body naturally begins to work more efficiently, becoming more and more capable of creating the most highly refined nutrition possible, which benefits every cell and tissue throughout the system. And because the digestive fire is the cornerstone of optimal health, we are also setting ourselves up for improved health and longevity in the long-term.
- **Employ Herbal and Bodily Intelligence.** Certain herbs and formulas have a particular affinity for specific cells and tissues. And because the body is accustomed to receiving nourishment from within, the systemic approach maximizes the intelligence of the herbs themselves and allows them to work in concert with your body's innate wisdom.





## Systemic Treatment Strategies to Consider

Here are a few suggestions for ways to nourish and strengthen your hair from the inside-out.

### Nourish the Hair with Your Diet

Eating a diet of fresh, whole foods and minimizing processed foods and sugars can go a long way toward improving the health of the entire system. Bolster this baseline with adequate fiber from fresh fruits and vegetables, along with healthy proteins and fats. Beyond that, there are a number of nutrient-rich foods that are especially supportive of hair health such as fresh, organic dairy products (non-homogenized whole milk, unfermented cheeses, and fresh, non-sour yogurts), carrots, beets, greens (like kale, spinach, and collards), sesame seeds and tahini, sunflower seeds, coconut, coconut water, and [ghee](#). Increasing your exposure to these foods will certainly bolster the nutrition available to the body and to your hair. In addition, including agni-kindling spices such as [cumin](#), black pepper, and [turmeric](#) will help to bolster hair health. It is equally important to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water throughout each day. This helps to optimize the health of the digestive and circulatory systems, and bolsters the body's capacity to carry out tissue nutrition.

If you know which dosha is most active in your hair imbalance, you can take this a step further by following a [vata-pacifying](#), [pitta-pacifying](#), or [kapha-pacifying](#) diet. If you are unsure of which dosha(s) are involved in your particular symptoms, please consider taking our short quiz to [determine current imbalances](#).

### Take Herbs Internally

Because the hair is so intimately connected to other tissues, and to your overall quality of life, there are a number of herbal formulas that can be highly beneficial:

[Healthy Hair tablets](#) include four of the most potent Ayurvedic herbs for optimizing hair health: bhringaraj, amalaki, brahmi, and hibiscus flower. This formula nourishes and detoxifies the hair while encouraging vibrant color, natural shine, and the most thick, lustrous, healthy hair possible. Take 1-2 tablets after meals.

[Triphala tablets](#) serve to cleanse and nourish the digestive tract to optimize the strength of agni, and therefore improve tissue nutrition throughout the system. This formula is also deeply rejuvenative, and can therefore benefit the hair more directly as well. Take 1-2 tablets about half an hour before bed with a glass of warm water.

[Healthy Bones tablets](#) are designed to bolster bone health and, because of the close connection between the bones and the hair, can also improve the health and vitality of the hair. Take 1-2 tablets after meals.

[Chyavanprash](#) is a potent rejuvenative jam made primarily of amalaki fruit. It cools and nourishes the digestive system and the deep tissues of the body to promote optimal health and vitality. Take 1-2 teaspoons in the morning before breakfast.

[Stress Ease tablets](#) may be appropriate if you recognize stress as a significant factor in your hair health. Take 1-2 tablets before meals.





## Tend to Your Lifestyle

Because of the fast-paced, high-stress culture we live in, ensuring that you have adequate rest and relaxation can actually go a long way toward improving the nourishment available to tissues throughout your body. Similarly, practicing meditation or *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises) can help to reduce stress while improving clarity, balancing the mind and the nervous system, and supporting optimal tissue nutrition. Not surprisingly, you are likely to experience the benefits of these practices in other areas of your life as well. If you do not have an established meditation practice, consider [Empty Bowl Meditation](#). For a more active approach, consider one or both of these breath work practices:

[Sheetali Pranayama](#) (Cooling Breath) is highly effective at balancing excess heat throughout the body, and kindling the digestive fire without provoking pitta.

[Nadi Shodhana](#) (Alternate Nostril Breathing) offers a potent means of balancing solar and lunar, masculine and feminine energies throughout the system, supports stress reduction, and is highly effective at balancing all three doshas—particularly vata and pitta.

Early morning is often an ideal time for these practices, but any time of day will prove beneficial. Even ten to fifteen minutes can be life-changing.

Appropriate exercise is equally important, as is carving out time to enjoy yourself.



# Your Path to Vibrant, Healthy Hair

As you can see, there is no shortage of options when it comes to Ayurvedic hair care. If you want a simple way to get started with Ayurvedic hair care, consider our [Healthy Hair Bundle](#), which includes [Healthy Hair Oil](#), [Healthy Hair tablets](#), and [Triphala tablets](#). The most important thing of course, is to pursue the remedies and practices that most resonate with you. Ayurveda is an ancient, holistic system of medicine with incredible wisdom to offer. And at the end of the day, you will be most served by the practices that best align with who you are, what you find nourishing and supportive, and what kinds of experiences feed and excite you. A combination of your own inner guidance with the wisdom of Ayurveda is sure to support you in cultivating gorgeous, healthy hair. We hope that we can continue to support you in achieving optimal health, radiant beauty, and a vibrant sense of wellness in every aspect of your life.

